

A black and white portrait of Ted Hughes, showing him from the chest up. He has dark, wavy hair and is looking slightly to the right with a serious expression. He is wearing a dark jacket over a light-colored shirt.

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The Poetry of Ted Hughes

**History
Myth
Identity**

AMZED HOSSEIN

THE POETRY OF TED HUGHES
HISTORY, MYTH, IDENTITY

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To My Parents

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is a study of the major poetry of Ted Hughes. In the early 1980s when we were postgraduate students, some of us were very excited by his work although it was outside our syllabus. Since then I have followed his poetic development with great fascination and love, later read him with my students, and attempted to translate his poetry. I also had an opportunity to meet and have a long talk with Hughes in 1989. In the course of this rather long engagement with the writings of Ted Hughes I have also incurred many debts of gratitude.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Page references for quotations from Hughes's poetry, identified in the text, are from the editions listed in the Bibliography. Quotations from *River* and *The Collected Poems: Sylvia Plath* are from the U.S. editions. The following abbreviations have been used:

HR	<i>The Hawk in the Rain</i>
L	<i>Lupercal</i>
W	<i>Wodwo</i>
C	<i>Crow: From the Life and Songs of the Crow</i>
SS	<i>Season Songs</i>
G	<i>Gaudete</i>
CB	<i>Cave Birds: An Alchemical Cave Drama</i>
M	<i>Moortown</i>
RE	<i>Remains Of Elmet</i>
R	<i>River</i>
WW	<i>Wolfwatching</i>
BL	<i>Birthday Letters</i>
CP	<i>Collected Poems</i>
WP	<i>Winter Pollen: Occasional Prose</i>
SGCB	<i>Shakespeare and the Goddess of Complete Being</i>
LTH	<i>Letters of Ted Hughes</i>
CPSP	<i>The Collected Poems: Sylvia Plath</i>

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INTRODUCTION

Ted Hughes (1930-1998) is acknowledged as one of the most original and powerful English poets of the post Second World War period. That does not mean that his poetic gifts and viewpoints were never disputed. He has had both his admirers and detractors, and when in 1984 he was named Poet Laureate, he received fresh lots of bouquets and brickbats.

Ted Hughes is a writer of versatile genius. Apart from more than a dozen books of poetry for adult readers, he has published a large body of writings for children. He has also written plays for the radio and the stage, besides collaborating with Peter Brook, the leading theatre director. He co-edited *Modern Poetry in Translation*, 1-10, from 1966 to 1971 as well as collaborating with Janos Csokits in translating the poetry of Janos Pilinszky. And his insightful critical opinions on matters literary, social and educational, though were scattered in the pages of magazines and journals, in Introductions to books edited by him, and interviews, are gradually coming to be appreciated as original thoughts and ideas.¹

The present study is primarily concerned with his major works of poetry which are characterized by a surprisingly great range, depth and intensity of vision. Rooted in some of the most important spheres of the English literary tradition, namely, the Middle English alliterative verse, Shakespeare, the English Bible, and an imaginative engagement with Nature, Hughes has gone on to enrich English poetry immensely.

His poetry, it has been felt, has maintained an ongoing dialogue with history—literary, sociopolitical, religious and intellectual. The great sweep of his imagination has taken in the most significant issues of life in the contemporary world, a world ravaged by a series of dirty and great wars, unprecedented bloodbath and carnage, threatened with extinction by nuclear stockpiles, ridden by intense psychical conflicts and horrors, and an ever-increasing danger of environmental pollution. His preoccupations with these dominant concerns of our life have often been gratuitously interpreted as perverse power-worship and obsessive admiration of violence.

Hughes has attempted to discover the bedrock from where life is struggling to triumph over the forces of death. This search takes him to discovering links between man and different aspects of Nature — earth and fire, animals and birds, plants and flowers, stones and rivers

and describing these relationships in terms of ancient rituals, myths and folklore. It is not twenty-first century animism, but close observation kindling a vivid imagination that dominates his poetry.

This pattern, however, emerges in his poetry slowly. In his early poems, one is struck by the presence of animals, powerful and predatory, not merely as photographic representations or impressionistic vignettes. While describing these subjects with penetrating accuracy and empathy, Hughes becomes aware of the presence and stirrings of a tremendous, almost unmanageable, raw energy. He perceives this energy not only in obviously powerful agencies and elements, but even in apparently frail creatures and weak forces in Nature, whose real strength shows in their invincibility. This energy—amoral, inexorable, leading to death and again to revival—is the binding force between all categories of the living and the non-living. A large number of his early poems ("The Hawk in the Rain", "Wind", "October Dawn" (*HR*); "Crow Hill", "Strawberry Hill", "To Paint a Water Lily", "Relic", "Thrushes", "Pike", "Snowdrop" (*L*) present a powerful observation of this "master-fulcrum of violence" operative at the heart of the universe.

It is an imagination kindled by a Galilean-Darwinian observation that dominates Hughes's poetry. This imagination perceives a vibrant energy to be present in man's biological being, in his instinctual drives and instinctive apprehensions. In primitive cultures man devised rituals and created myths to confront and negotiate with this energy. He could thus be at peace with himself and of benefit to his community. It also enabled him to regard himself as part of the material universe or Nature, which was then personified as Mother Earth or Mother Goddess in a destructive-creative continuum. In ancient Roman culture, the celebration of Lupercalia—though related to a male fertility god Lupercus—was a vestige of the primitive fertility cults. Hughes's poem "Lupercalia" is an early attempt at reconstructing the ritual by which a barren woman, "perfect,/But flung from the wheel of the living,/The past killed in her, the future plucked out", can be fertilized. The tone in which the dogs, the goats, the racers and the "Fresh thongs of goat-skin/In their hands. . ./And deliberate welts" snatching the barren woman "To the figure of racers" are described, evokes the sense of awe and sacredness with which ancient men viewed the principle of generation in man and in Nature.

But the violence associated with such rituals, as well as with the processes of Nature that have been visualized in Hughes's nature poetry, has to be clearly distinguished from the violence which has been practised by men for neither the procreation nor the preservation of life, but merely for the sake of destruction or for self-aggrandizement. Hughes's

explorative poetry, from *Wodwo* onwards, has attempted to locate the roots of man's 'destructiveness for the sake of destruction' within human nature, fragmented and perverted by a narrow puritanical-repressive religious ethos and the reign of intellect-centric, unimaginative, blinkered materialism. With the rise of these twin forces, modern Western man has been estranged from the concept of the Mother Goddess. He has tried to reform her with the concept of God as Logos, the Rational Principle and All-Good, separating the destructive aspect of the original composite and projecting it into an external source personified as the Devil. In the process the ancient Mother Goddess, and therefore, woman, came to be regarded as the Devil's partner. In breaking apart his ideal, rationalist-puritanical man divided his own nature, too, and tended to suppress the life of the body, proclaiming the supremacy of intellect and abstract reasoning. With the rituals and myths decried, he was bereft of the dramatic means of attaining fulfilment that would release his tension and free the instinctual energies in a creative way. This has left him guilt-ridden, biased, sterile, restless and violent. The suppressed energies have been turned into murderous forces and have manifested themselves in savage and mindless devastation. Several poems in *Wodwo* ("Logos", "Gog" and "Karma") are powerful renderings of a collision between the Mother Goddess and God. A variation on the theme, in the form of a destructive violence perpetrated by the offspring upon the mother, is presented in his poems "Crow and Mama", "Revenge Fable" and "Song for a Phallus". Man's brute violence has occupied a large place in Hughes's poetry throughout.

Hughes's study of violence, therefore, is marked by a pattern. From observing violence as a fact and unavoidable process of Nature, his gaze shifts to the violence in human society, tracking it down to its roots, and finally goes beyond the shock, desolation and decay. Hughes's growing interest in the Eastern thoughts along with his interest in other cultures has played an important role in the evolution of his ideas and sympathies. In his interview at Dhaka in 1989, he referred to Attar, the Sufi poet, to Tibetan Buddhism, Indian mystic thought, and to "the spirit of the East which should suffuse the West". Many of his poems in *Wodwo* ("Wino", "Stations") contain Sufic echoes, and the Epilogue lyrics of *Gaudete* reflect the devotional glow of South Indian Vacana poetry. In his later poetry he is fascinated by the image of "the real Samadhi — wordless, levitated" ("Strangers", R, p. 41). Or, as in "Riverwatcher", he describes "the river-fetch" as

The yell of the Muezzin
Or the "Bismillah!"
That spins the dancer in

Her whole body liquefied
 Where a body loves to be
 Rapt in the river of its own music. (R, p. 71)

This is not to praise a disguised occultism, what some would choose to dub as literary hippie-cult. Borrowing from the great religions of the world their mythological elements, Hughes rather tries to develop a syncretistic religion, which, far from being a step back towards obscurantism, is actually a step forward into the future world of hope and love and joy, free from mindless violence and one with the whole of Nature, the whole of man.

He seems to be interested in the Eastern mystic thought and practice inasmuch as he finds a basic similarity between its quest pattern and that of the archaic rituals, myths and folktales. The quest, following the formula of symbolic death and dismemberment of the false self and then the regeneration and rebirth of the genuine self, offers him a framework and a series of images to resolve man's fragmentary experience into an integrated equation.

His early poems (*HR* and *L*) are not woven in an overall framework and remain separate pieces. In *Wodwo*, however, a kind of networking can be discerned in spite of some fragmentariness in some of the poems. In his next three works, his most important ones—*Crow*, *Gaudete* and *Cave Birds*—he has used sequences of interrelated poems to dramatize his vision of man's predicament along with its full implications.

For Hughes the dynamics of the self is closely related to Nature's biological dynamics. With his realization of the possibilities of the self, he has been able to create a unique body of nature poetry in *Season Songs*, "Moortown" sequence in *Moortown*, *Remains of Elmet*, *River* and in some poems of *Wolfwatching*. Here his theme is the plasticity of life, the adaptive capabilities of life, even in extreme environments. They are also concerned with the interconnectedness of all life-forms within a single ecosphere and man's ecological responsibility. They subtly reveal Hughes's dismay at the desecration of the sacred space of biosphere by industrial pollution and unsustainable urbanization as well as his exhilaration at the signs of nature recovering lost ground, recuperating and being healed. In a language which is a fusion of the scientific and the emotive, he shows how life always resumes its cycle and "death seems a superficiality/Of scaly limbs, parasitical."

During the last phase of his life, apart from his major translation projects, the most important volume of Hughes's own poetry is *Birthday Letters* which may appear to be *sui generis* among his other works. However, one may look at these poems as shamanic exercises that invoke the memories of his relationship with his first wife Sylvia Plath.

His poetry acts as an audio-visual mixer of a wide range of sensibilities and perceptions as his forging of images generates physical and spiritual resonances. Sometimes the high pressure and temperature under which the images are forged place them in an indeterminate state, hazed and fused; they become inscrutable and indecipherable. Sometimes his references are intractable and the meaning becomes obscure. But, on the whole, his metaphors and sound-patterns, free grammar and free verse, incessant compound formations and syntactic liberties telescope rich thoughts and feelings and give us an exciting and healing experience.

CHAPTER ONE

THE LITERARY SCENE

1 The Movement Poetry

Following the law of action and reaction, English poetry after the Second World War concerned itself with a revaluation of the native English tradition.¹ The general poetic climate was marked by a reaction against the modern movement in poetry as initiated, chiefly, by T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound. Their stylistic experiments and innovations, emphasis on an awareness of European literary tradition, and their ideal of what amounted to be a "complex poetry for a complex age"², were perceived at best to be a "splendid irrelevance"³, or an American imposition and an interruption of the central current of English poetry.⁴ W.B. Yeats's talent was admired,⁵ but he was not regarded as a worthy model to follow.⁶ Auden's "technical influence"⁷ notwithstanding, there was a general debunking of the major poets of the thirties, particularly of their concern in issues of international politics, economic crisis, and Marxist and Freudian theories.⁸ The neo-Romanticism of Dylan Thomas was paid only lip-service,⁹ and almost the whole of the forties generation of poets was dismissed as notoriously "overblown, exaggerated, strained and rhetorical".¹⁰

What the emerging young poets of the 1950s wanted was a return to traditional stanza and prosodic forms, cool reasoning, logical progression and clarity of statement. The chief concern was to avoid display of strong emotions. Setting the poetic vision above reason; loose lush verse, even free verse; recourse to mythopoeia in the exploration of contemporary reality; allusiveness; suppression of plot, and the association of hallucinatory, disorderly images derived from dreams—all were anathema. What Philip Larkin, the most highly acclaimed of these poets, said in 1955 is characteristic of them all:

I write poems to preserve things I have seen/thought/felt (if I may so indicate, a composite and complex experience) both for myself and for others, though I feel that my prime responsibility is to the experience itself, which I am trying to keep from oblivion for its own sake....

As a guiding principle I believe that every poem must be its own sole freshly created universe, and therefore have no belief in 'tradition' or a common myth-kitty or casual allusions in poems to other poems or poets....¹¹

This was a reaction to the intellectualism and social consciousness of the previous three decades. These poets wanted poetry to communicate without either the poet or the reader needing to have a lot of erudition or cosmopolitan culture in order to express or grasp the experience held up in poetry. There, however, were poets like John Wain, Donald Davie or D. J. Enright, academics all, demanding from their readers substantial acquaintance with many academic disciplines.¹² Even if they did not always share the same beliefs or attitudes, what they had in common was a "negative determination to avoid bad principles." They emerged "progressing from different viewpoints to a certain unity of approach, a new and healthy general standpoint".¹³ This healthy poetry,

submits to no great systems or theoretical constructs, no agglomerations or unconscious commands. It is free from both mystical and logical compulsions—and like modern philosophy—is empirical in its attitude to all that comes...

On the technical side, though of course related to all this, we see a refusal to abandon a rational structure and comprehensible language, even when the verse is most highly charged with sensuous or emotional intent.¹⁴

Conquest's 1956 anthology of nine selected poets tried to "represent present trends"¹⁵ and project those poets as a group. Its aggressively provocative Introduction attempted to provide the new poetry with a unifying focus: freedom from jargon and cant, dependence on native common sense, an empirical approach, and insistence on sanity, "Sanity and again Sanity and above all Sanity", to use Hughes's words in a different context¹⁶.

About two years before that, an article in the *Spectator* titled "In the Movement", had announced even more provocatively "the emergence of a new movement in British poetry and fiction" and discussed the phenomenon in a tongue-in-cheek manner by referring to it simply as "the Movement" with a capital M:

It is bored by the despair of the Forties, not much interested in suffering, and extremely impatient of poetic sensibility, especially poetic sensibility about 'the writer and society'. So it's goodbye to all those sad little discussions about 'how the writer ought to live', and it's goodbye to the Little Magazine and 'experimental writing'. The Movement, as well as being anti-phoney, is anti-wet; sceptical, robust, ironic, prepared to be as comfortable as possible in a wicked, commercial, threatened world, which doesn't look, anyway, as if it's going to be changed much by a couple of handfuls of young writers. This avant-gardism tried to shake off as pretentious and sentimental, the despair, the socialist concerns and the urge for technical innovation of the preceding three generations, and to sound honest, tough, level-headed, characteristically middle-class with its understatement and urbanity.¹⁷

The *Spectator* article carried on the note of gentle banter: "Who do you take with you on the long week-ends in Sussex cottages? Kafka and

Kirkegaard, Proust, and Henry James? Dylan Thomas, *The Confidential Clerk*, *The Age of Anxiety*, *The Golden Horizon*? belong to an age that is passing",¹⁸ and created a lively debate.¹⁹ With the publication of Conquest's *New Lines*, the appellation of "Movement" writers came to be firmly fixed on its contributors.

The name stuck, although many reasoned insights were offered into this literary phenomenon,²⁰ for which John Lehman had played the fairy godmother with his series of radio programme *New Soundings* on the BBC. John Wain's radio programme *First Readings* had claimed that "a period of expansion has to be followed by a period of consolidation"²¹ and his 1950 article published in the last number of *Penguin New Writing* had championed the virtues of the poetry of William Empson. Many polemical articles and letters came out in the pages of *Essays and Criticism*, *Spectator*, *Listener*, and *New Statesman*. Bernard Bergonzi traced a link between "the other Oxford phenomenon of the 'fifties—linguistic philosophy" and the Movement poets, many of whom had an Oxford connection²². A counter-anthology to *New Lines*, called *Mavericks*, selecting "poets unafraid of sensitivity and sentiment" was launched by Howard Sergeant and Dannie Abse in 1957,²³ but failed to nudge the Movement away from centre-stage on the literary scene.

Some of the Movement poets, particularly Philip Larkin and Thom Gunn, later denied that their poetry had anything to do with the group-image of the Movement. Although they suggested that it was merely a media hype,²⁴ the Movement is now looked upon as an important historical phenomenon.

A close look at the poems published in *New Lines* gives one mixed feelings. A sense of the sacred, sincere and serious, glows below the surface of ironic irreverence in Larkin: "Hatless, I take off/My cycle-clips in an awkward reverence" ("Church Going", *New Lines*, pp. 20-22). The last stanza, suddenly pitching to an elevated tone in contrast to the colloquialism of what goes before, dramatizes the divided sensibility of a modern man brought up in a secular culture:

A serious house on serious earth it is,
In whose blent air all our compulsions rest,
Are recognised, and robed as destinies.
And that much never can be obsolete,
Since someone will for ever be surprising
A hunger in himself to be more serious,
And gravitating with it to this ground,
Which, he once read, was proper to grow wise in,
If only that so many dead lie around.

But in "I Remember, I Remember" (*New Lines*, pp. 22-23), Larkin chooses to be evasive, alienated, and deflating. When just about to get

nostalgic about his native town, he is asked "Was that. . . where you have your roots?", he reacts. "Roots" is too loaded a word for him. He can only say, "No, only where my childhood was unspent. . . / Just where I started". He refuses to recognize any hidden, deeper, organic relationship between himself and the place of his birth. He is afraid of being romantic. But this refusal to come to terms with one's own past can only end in an attempt at being merely clever. By undermining the melancholy attraction felt for the place ("Why, Coventry! I exclaimed"), the debunking tone lays bare the cleavage between the two selves, and the poem turns out to be a banal record of a self-conscious adolescent's confusion.

A similar kind of evasion is to be noticed in John Wain's "Reason for Not Writing Orthodox Nature Poetry" (*New Lines*, pp. 83-84). He laughs at the transcendental view of nature adopted by sages, prophets and poets, and dismisses it as old and useless. He "can never speak by rote" of his love for "this mountain and this bay", nor can he devise other evocative means of expression to make his love appear convincing. When he says "where you love you cannot break away", he unwittingly confesses to the element of mystery inherent in this love, but the posture of heterodoxy prevents him from exploring this mystery. The "plain" desire to be "Content, without embellishment, to note, / How little beauty bids the heart rejoice," fails to hide the self-righteous stance, the intellectual and emotional poverty. Not that any "glittering intellectuality" or "metaphysical wit",²⁵ could ever be established in the work of these poets. This self-conscious anti-rhetoric becomes more and more a self-defeating pose as it tries to tackle complex experiences in poems like "Don't Let's Spoil It All, I Thought We Were Going to Be Such Good Friends" (John Wain, *New Lines*, p. 89).

The satire on academic ingenuity, and insensitivity to real suffering, in D. J. Enright's "The Interpreters (or, How to Bury Yourself in a Book)", is entertaining and one might even say, moving. But it is not quite clear whether intellectualism is to be wholly abjured:

But the scholars are chasing a glittering fragment of
Zen or the cracked semblance of an Emblem—
for it is not what a poem merely says that matters,
elsewhere than here it finds its true signification :

Whore, you may be sure,
refers to some mysterious metaphysical temptation;
hunger was his image for a broken dream; bread
an old religious symbol; his typhoons the wind of God.

(*New Lines*, p. 61)

In fact, this appears to be as clever and allusive as the poetry of the twenties and the thirties, minus the ideological ferment of those decades.

There is a surfeit of quibbling and dribbling as in Kingsley Amis's "Against Romanticism":

the brain raging with prophecy,
Raging to discard real time and place
Raging to build a better time and place
Than the ones which give prophecy its field
To work, the calm material for its rage,
And the context which makes it prophecy. (*New Lines*, pp 45-46)

The preference for "images plain", "Buildings free from all grime of history" and "Woods devoid of beasts" over "wilderness", "Bodies rich with heat" and "legendary... taste", is paraded as a mark of being down-to-earth and clear-headed. One is advised to avoid "the scrub hedge /Down the sea" and to "Keep to the wet streets where/Mercury and sodium flood their sullen fire" (John Holloway, "Warning to a Guest", *New Lines*, pp. 16-17). The sea is no place for the people of the post-industrial society, who, to "sustain [their] pose/Need wine and conversation, colour and light" more than anything else. There is an unabashed exhibition of a supposedly practical wisdom, a proper understanding of the present-day world ethos. In effect, it turns out to be a smug middlebrow love for practical utilities and convenient arrangements. Half-hearted and cautious, these poets tried to philosophize all the time and preach the virtue of the best of all possible worlds. Cleverness is writ large all over the credo that abjures passions:

Donne could be daring, but he never knew,
When he inquired, 'Who's injured by my love?
Love's radio-active fall-out on a large
Expanse around the point it bursts above.

'Alas, alas, who's injured by my love?'
And recent history answers: Half Japan!
Not love, but hate? Well, both are versions of
The 'feeling' that you dare me to. Be dumb!
Appear concerned only to make it scan!
How dare we now be anything but numb?

(Donald Davie, "Rejoinder to a Critic", *New Lines*, p. 67)

With the memory of the devastation and horror of the Second World War fresh in people's mind, Davie exploits the image to create a sense of revulsion against strong feeling although without appropriate reasoning. That would make the sentiment very up to date and the diction state-of-the-art. Larkin refers to George Fraser as "saying that poetry was either 'veeshion'—he was Scotch—or 'moaral deescourse'" ²⁶. "Rejoinder to a Critic" can also be taken as an example of poetry as moral discourse although there is no attempt at facing the hidden forces that caused such shocking annihilation. These poets, of course, would not accept the charge of evasion, or moral cowardice. As Davie told Alvarez: "I agree

with you that humanity and human relations are under an intolerable strain in our time... Neurosis is very prevalent indeed and menaces all of us. Now in such a situation, the principal first requirement is to keep sane, to keep the neurosis at bay as far as possible".²⁷

Alvarez found this claim inadmissible and argued in his Introduction (called "Beyond the Gentility Principle") to the Penguin anthology, *The New Poetry*, (1962) that the Movement aesthetic was predominantly marked by the "concept of gentility". This he defined as "a belief that life is more or less orderly, people always more or less polite, their emotions and habits more or less decent and more or less controllable, that God, in short, is more or less good". His chief allegation against the Movement poets is that they did not want to face the mass evil, public savagery, forces of disintegration and breakdown at work both outside and within us, "forces which have nothing to do with gentility, decency or politeness". They wanted to remain detached from the findings of psychoanalysis, the concentration camps, the hydrogen bomb or other modern horrors and in his view "it is hard to live in an age of psychoanalysis and feel oneself wholly detached from the dominant public savagery".²⁸ Alvarez's argument seems to be valid for all those poets except, perhaps, Larkin. He points out the narrowness of their range and shallowness of probe into human experience. But the pastiche that he made by taking eight lines from eight of the poets who appeared in *New Lines* to suggest a homogeneity of flatness "in the quality both of the language and the experience",²⁹ seems a rather unfair dig. Alvarez's approving pat for their "concern for the disciplined verse",³⁰ is cold comfort, for the skill in adhering to complex metrical forms without any worthwhile experience or subject-matter makes the technical virtuosity itself suspect.

After all is said and done, the Movement poetry's lack of pretence and sentimentality has to be commended. Their inherent contradiction stems from their desire to write about everyday things and their taking recourse to erudite, sophisticated expression. There is a terribly demeaning egotism about their poetry. Charles Tomlinson's criticism that they "showed a singular want of vital awareness of the continuum outside themselves, of the mystery embodied over against them in the created universe"³¹ seems to have been conceded by Davie. Pointing out "the striking absence from 'Movement' poetry of outward and non-human things apprehended crisply for their own sakes", Davie writes:

Hardly ever did we seem to write our poems out of an idea of poetry as a way of knowing the world we were in, apprehending it, learning it.... In 'Movement' poetry the poet is never so surrendered to his experience, never so far gone out of himself in his response, as not to be aware of the attitude he is taking up. It is as if experience, as if the

world, could be permitted to impinge on the poet only if he had first defined the terms in which it may present itself; as if the world never imposes its own conditions, but must wait cap-in-hand until the writer is prepared to entertain it (with the lighting and the angle previously arranged).³²

And because of this absence of the non-human universe, their poetry lacks in spontaneity, a sense of wonder and imaginative revelation. Kathleen Raine wrote in a letter to the *Times Literary Supplement*, 8 June 1956:

There seems to be a school of young poets who have never heard of Muse or daimon and who write only from personal experience. Inspiration is one thing, personal Memory quite another; and as Blake never tired of pointing out, memory is not a Muse³³.

Eschewing all socio-political concerns, banishing the nonhuman universe from the domain of thought and experience, confining themselves to the pedestrian interests in neo-Augustan vein, these poets only grew anaemic and emasculated.

2 The Emergence of Ted Hughes

When Ted Hughes appeared on this genteel literary scene with *The Hawk in the Rain*, he obviously appeared to be an outsider. Here was poetry that was stridently imaginative, inspirational and visionary. The lines "I imagine this midnight moment's forest:/Something else is alive", ("The Thought-Fox", *HR* p. 15) invoke from some "deeper within darkness" a fox "with a sudden sharp hot stink". The idea of the poem is like this fox and writing poetry is putting on record the visitation of a mysterious energy. Here was poetry that sang the paean of the power of the elemental forces of nature ("Wind", "October Dawn") and that presented animals and birds as the embodiment of a sheer vital force ("The Hawk in the Rain", "The Jaguar", "Macaw and Little Miss", "The Horses", and "Meeting"). His central concern seemed to be to record the throbbing of a primeval energy at the heart of the universe, manifesting itself through the elementals, the movements of the seasons, and the behaviour of all forms of life. Civilized man, as Hughes showed in "Egg-Head" (*HR*, p. 37), "resists receiving the flash/Of the sun, the bolt of the earth".

His second volume, *Lupercal*, reinforced this Heathcliffian impression by continuing the exploration of this energy. Birds and animals, fish and plants, dominate the scene. His landscape, which is not merely a lifeless mass of rocks and stones, earth and water, but which heaves with a force that is gentle and fierce, relentless and dormant, touches the reader:

Buttoned from the blowing mist
Walk the ridges of ruined stone.

What humbles these hills has raised
 The arrogance of blood and bone,
 And thrown the hawk upon the wind,
 And lit the fox in the dripping ground. ("Crow Hill", L. p.14)

The vision is of a force that operates through the landscape as also sustains the animal world. Birds and animals, wind and rain, plants and streams, are all participants in a cosmic drama of creation and destruction. The living and the non-living, the frail and the fierce—are all embodiments of the same energy: "Pigs upon delicate feet/Hold off the sky, trample the strength/That shall level these hills at length". In "Pennines in April", Hughes has the feeling that

these hills heaving
 Out of the east, mass behind mass, at this height
 Hoisting heather and stones to the sky
 Must burst upwards and topple into Lancashire.

But this is not merely a matter of accurate observation while the landscape is contemplated, there is a surging of empathy, a resonance of sensations, and the spirit of the macrocosm infuses the observer's soul:

Perhaps, as the earth turns, such ground-stresses
 Do come rolling westward through the locked land.
 Now, measuring the miles of silence
 Your eye takes the strain: through

Landscapes gliding blue as water
 Those barrellings of strength are heaving slowly and heave

To your feet and surf upwards
 In a still, fiery air, hauling the imagination,
 Carrying the larks upward. ("Pennines in April", L. p. 25)

This continuum of energy, not in just animals, but in heather, stones, water, and air, impels the larks and the hawk to fly upward, destroys forms of life and again causes the flowers to bloom. In a frail plant ("Snowdrop", L. p. 58) Hughes discovers the same force at work:

She, too, pursues her ends,
 Brutal as the stars of this month,
 Her pale head heavy as metal.

The Movement poets, typical Welfare State gentlemen breathing post-industrial efficiency and health-care cleanliness, preferred pleasant modern amenities to "grime of history" and uncertainties at wildernesses. Hughes's landscapes and his vision were only likely to horrify them. Donald Davie dismisses Hughes's landscape while praising Larkin's because "the England in his [Larkin's] poems is the England we have inhabited":

We all know that England still has bullfrogs and otters and tramps
 asleep in ditches; yet because in the landscape of Hughes's poems these

shaggy features bulk so large, it may strike us as more an Irish landscape than an English one.³⁴

The comment shows that it is possible even for a practising poet to read poetry like a geographer and miss the glowing line of imagination completely. Others thought Hughes to be derivative and old-fashioned. Elizabeth Jennings, one of the original *New Lines* poets, thought that Hughes should not have been included in *New Lines-II*, for "it is now extremely hard to see how his often Lawrence-influenced verse could ever have been considered lacking in flamboyance or belligerence",—³⁵ two things the Movement poets would avoid like poison.

3 Ted Hughes and Tradition

Although Hughes stands in stark contrast to the major poets of the fifties, as a poet he did not exactly emerge from a vacuum. Ekbert Faas's formulation that "Hughes... finds his company in an international artistic context characterized by its departure from the mainstream Western tradition" is justified only when Hughes is seen from the perspective of his later development. But the application of "this wider framework" of the "new global tradition and aesthetic"³⁶ must not blur the fact that he has his roots in the native tradition of English poetry from old alliterative heroic verse to Hopkins, from Wordsworth to Lawrence. What Hughes himself said to Faas is revealing: when Faas asked him to explain his attitude toward the mainstream of English poetic tradition,—he had once referred to it as "the terrible, suffocating, maternal octopus of ancient English poetic tradition"—Hughes said:

I imagine I wouldn't have said that if I hadn't burdened myself with a good deal of it. I should think my idea of the mainstream is pretty close to Robert Conquest's. What I meant by the octopus was the terrific magnetic power of the tradition to grip poets and hold them. Helped by our infatuation with our English past in general. The archetypes are always there waiting... swashbuckling Elizabethan, earthy bawdy Restoration blade and so on. And some of the great poets are such powerful magnetic fields they remake us in their own image before we're aware. Shakespeare in particular, of course.³⁷

He admits that he was not immune from the influence exerted by the great masters of English literature. He wrote his first poems when in his teens by imitating Kipling, Eliot and Yeats. At Cambridge, he soaked himself in Yeats's poetry and Anthropology.³⁸ When he next started writing at about the age twenty-five, he read a Penguin selection of some American poets like Shapiro, Lowell, Merwin and John Crowe Ransom, which really put him into production. Ransom in particular helped him to get his "words into focus" and gave him a "model" which

he felt he could use.³⁹ However, he clarified that "in the way of influence... everything goes into the stew".⁴⁰

From a reading of his first two volumes it is apparent that in his reaction against the industrial civilization and its concomitant evils, he harked back to Blake, Wordsworth, Lawrence and Yeats; in his wrenching of syntax, compound-formations and telescoping of diverse images and experiences, he thought and wrote under the influence of Donne, Hopkins and Dylan Thomas. He has derived insights into manipulation of language from the example of Shakespeare's "inspired dialect".⁴¹ And finally, as Seamus Heaney shows, he has revived and exploited the Anglo-Saxon and Norse elements in English which created "the Middle English alliterative tradition and then went underground to sustain folk poetry, the ballads and the ebullience of Shakespeare and the Elizabethans".⁴² The Middle English alliterative tradition has special personal relevance for Hughes, for it is connected with the West Yorkshire dialect which he spoke in his childhood.⁴³ Such bonds and elements of influence only serve to underline the strong links Hughes had with the native English tradition.

CHAPTER TWO

THE SOCIOPOLITICAL BACKGROUND

1 An Age of Consolidation

The shifts in the poetic sensibilities and styles of the 1950s were brought about by, among many other factors, the sociopolitical realities of postwar Britain. But Ted Hughes's response to the general sociopolitical scene was different from that of the Movement poets. There were reasons for this. Though Hughes shared a lower-middle class background and academic training in one of the ancient Universities with them, there the resemblances ended. Most of the Movement poets had some kind of direct exposure to the Second World War. Some of them were in active service, their academic life interrupted by the war. Only Larkin and Wain failing their medical tests were kept away from the front¹. But Hughes was too young for the War. He lived the war only vicariously, as he listened to his father who had taken part in the First World War and survived along with sixteen others of a whole regiment that was destroyed at Gallipoli². This gap in age and experience, Hughes himself suggests³, was responsible for the distinction he had from the Movement poets in his perception and approach to poetry. An examination of the postwar sociopolitical scene may help to perceive the underlying forces at work in the poetic matrix of both the Movement poets and Hughes.

After the end of the Second World War Britain was passing through some sweeping changes in its political, social and economic life. A Labour Government, elected with an overwhelming majority in 1945⁴, adopted many measures that marked a break with the past. The railways, coal, gas, electricity, road transport and steel were taken into public ownership. A National Health Service was established to give free medical care for all. The House of Lords were reduced, and the last tokens of pre-1932 franchise privileges, conferring multiple votes upon a few, were repealed. Rationing, started during the war years (1939-45) continued on some food items. Industry was subject to strict controls. Wages were frozen between 1948 and 1950. These measures were intended to encourage the reconstruction of industry, which had been starved of investment as well as being damaged by bombs. So the 1945-51 Labour Government adopted a policy of austerity and fair shares.

The poetry of the Movement reflected this post-war spirit by its affirmation of values like "order", "coherence" and common sense. John Wain's comment in his *First Readings* on the BBC Third Programme that "a period of expansion has to be followed by a consolidation"⁵ became almost a slogan of the Movement. Indeed, Donald Davie notes that the word "consolidation" "achieved such general currency as a literary talking point that it has become, what perhaps Mr. Wain never intended, a sort of manifesto".⁶ John Wain makes this point more elaborately and explicitly elsewhere:

The earliest modern poets had been form-breakers... This breaking of forms was essential... But thirty years had rolled by; the world had been drugged by two decades of meaningless peace and then suddenly battered nearly to death by a global war. Worse, that war had ended with the fearful savagery of Hiroshima and Nagasaki...

At such a time, when exhaustion and boredom in the foreground are balanced by guilt and fear in the background, it is natural that a poet should feel the impulse to build. Writing regular and disciplined verse-forms is building in a simple and obvious sense, like bricklaying. Too simple, too obvious? Perhaps. But we were all very young and were doing the best we could to make something amid the ruins.⁷

Wain's equation between writing regular verse and doing something socially useful or socially necessary, salvaging something from "ruins" and "building" the society anew, puts the poet on a programme. Chasing private faiths and novel forms, as the earlier post-war generation from Eliot to Isherwood did, would be an act of irresponsibility in the prevailing context, implies Wain.

2 Class and Provincial Values

The Movement poets seemed to represent in poetic terms the shifts in power and social structure in post-war Britain. Almost all of them—except Thom Gunn—were from the lower middle class which was being regarded as the "coming" class⁸ with the redistribution of income and reallocation of status in the newly created Welfare State. The Movement poetry took the position that the poetry of the 1930s was, though "left-wing, ... profoundly upper class"⁹. Donald Davie, in "Remembering the 'Thirties" (*New Lines*, pp.70-72), debunks the social, political and aesthetic preoccupations of the thirties poets. He explains the "sociological importance" of the class background of the Movement poets and their opposition to the "haut-bourgeois" 1930 generation:

I'm like Wain and Larkin and others in being a product of the provinces, and not of the rural provinces known to the tourist, but of the industrial Midlands, in my case the South Yorkshire coalfield; and, like nearly everyone else in the group I'm a product of the lower-middle class... Accordingly my history is the history of my education and duplicates

that of all the rest—a winning of the way to one of the ancient universities by competitive examinations, rather than the going there as a matter of course as in the case of products of more privileged classes, such as Spender, Auden, Lehmann and Connolly and almost every writer of previous generations that you can think of...

[The Movement's] sociological importance is very great, and it consists in this—that for the first time a challenge is thrown down, not by individuals like Lawrence, Arnold Bennett, Dylan Thomas, but by a more or less coherent group, to the monopoly of British culture sustained for generations by the London haut-bourgeois.¹⁰

Although the Movement poets were reputed to be hostile to the "old order", they also at the same time maintained an attitude of deference for many of its values and institutions. Blake Morrison points out:

For the scholarship boys, in particular, a feeling of pride in, and gratitude for, having achieved Oxbridge places necessarily qualified feelings of hostility; there was a tendency to see in their own 'success' evidence of the basic justice and openness of British society.¹¹

This position of the Movement writers created in them an ambivalence that resented the old order but lacked the nerve openly to oppose it or rebel against it. Politically, they also tried to maintain a sort of neutrality. In their texts, they tried to defend such ideas as "adjustment", "compromise", "failure of nerve", "evasion". They resent authority, snobbery and elitism but would not attempt to change the social structure which perpetuates these attitudes; indeed, they lack the nerve to escape or to rebel openly. Davie quite consistently treats "failure of nerve" as "a positive humanizing force"¹². In "Creon's Mouse", Davie makes a direct reference to the idea that passive acceptance of status quo is preferable to direct engagement in socio-political battle:

If too much daring brought (he thought) the war,
When that was over nothing else would serve.
But no one must be daring any more,
A self-induced and stubborn loss of nerve.¹³

Davie has confirmed this stance and expressed his preference for a foreign policy of non-intervention by the Western powers in crises like Budapest in 1956 and Prague in 1968 to one which "took Britain into Suez crisis and America into Vietnam"¹⁴.

Many social historians have suggested that this attitude of compromise among the Movement intelligentsia was engendered by the system of division of the spoils. Peter Laslett suggests:

If you relentlessly search out the best brains from every social and geographical area of the community, search them out and satisfy them early with the delights of a carefully preserved and ingeniously improvised social superiority, you have instilled self-satisfaction good and early. That is the secret of the angry young men of Britain. They have nothing to rebel against'.¹⁵

That was why the Movement poets were bluntly expressing their intention to be accommodating¹⁶ or were justifying the futility or inadvisability of revolt¹⁷. They were surreptitiously eulogizing the old glories, expressing regrets and frustrations for the lost glory and power of the system, and too readily grabbing the privileges that were coming by their way¹⁸.

3 "Little England"

The post-war political-historical climate in Britain also gives us some clues to their lack of daring, loss of nerve and upholding of a phoney ideology of political neutrality or non-commitment, in short, what Alvarez calls their "gentility"¹⁹.

In the years during and after the War, Britain's decline as a world power was gradually becoming evident. The USA and the USSR emerged as the two superpowers in the world. Britain had to depend on the US support during the war. In the postwar years Britain realized that "some of the most vital aspects of her position in the world were substantially beyond her control"²⁰. So the Government began to emphasize "buckling to" and getting things right at home. The value of the pound was reduced by a third in 1949. The process of decolonization and the retreat of British imperialism started. Several Commonwealth countries were given independence from 1947 onwards. As a matter of fact, between 1945 and 1960 some 500 million people in former British colonies became completely self-governing.²¹ This was a major event in world history, and then in 1956 the fiasco of the Suez war demonstrated publicly and conclusively that Britain was no longer one of the world's great military powers. The major Movement figures maintained an attitude of either tacit disapproval or studied ambivalence over Anthony Eden's blunder about Egypt²². Loss of power, one of the major facts of Britain's political position since 1939, absorbed all English hearts, and the country was felt to be undergoing a general decline. Nostalgia was the prevalent emotion in the situation and the poets made much of their feelings of loss, regret, wistfulness and insularity. Davie's line "But no one must be daring any more"²³ expressed the philosophy of "once bitten twice shy".

4 The Economic Recovery

Meanwhile, tangible changes were taking place on the national scene. Britain was rapidly recovering to economic resurgence. Hughes's arrival at Cambridge in 1951 coincided with the comeback of the Conservative Government²⁴, which, without losing time, started privatization of selected industries. Freedom of enterprise and competition were being encouraged, to which the Labour party did not offer much opposition either. The political scene was marked by what came to be called "Butskellism",

because of the agreement found between the policies of the Conservative Chancellor of the Exchequer, R. A. Butler, and the leader of the Labour Party, Hugh Gaitskell.

Ted Hughes must have found this air of free-ranging adventurousness and personal enterprise congenial. He seems to acknowledge this in his 1971 interview to Egbert Faas:

One of the things those poets had in common I think was the post-war mood of having had enough ... enough rhetoric, enough overweening push of any kind, enough of the dark gods, enough of the id, enough of the Angelic powers and the heroic efforts to make new worlds. They'd seen it all turn into death camps and atomic bombs. All they wanted was to get back to civvies and get home to the wife and kids and for the rest of their lives not a thing was going to interfere with a nice cigarette and a nice view of the park. The second war after all was a colossal negative revelation. In a sense it meant they recoiled to some essential English strength. But it set them dead against negotiation with anything outside the coziest arrangement of society. They wanted it cozy. . . Now I came a bit later. I hadn't had enough. I was all for opening negotiations with whatever happened to be out there.²⁵

Hughes's own temperament of a robust visionary and an intrepid seeker was seemingly in tune with the spirit of the period. His youthful vigour was ready to undertake bold ventures, confront uncertainty, and open negotiation with anything and everything, and was not content with merely "Screaming the place down here".²⁶ Flowers and fruits and water and stone were important physical realities for him, and he set out to shape his metaphysics anew.

However, this spirit of bold adventure was really very different in character from the social ethos of Hughes's own generation that was developing with the expanding economy and rising standard of living in Britain during the 1950s.

The 1950s in Britain were marked by the arrival of what has been called "the affluent society". While affluence was not yet general, there was a widespread gradual improvement in living standards. British society could now boast of full employment, economic growth and mass consumption. Its ethos was that of a competitive, thrusting and consumerist society. Within a few years, most households had their own television sets, refrigerators, washing machines and other consumer goods. Owning one's own car was a matter of course with both the middle and working classes.²⁷ Harold Macmillan, the Prime Minister most identified with promoting an awareness of prosperity, proudly declared in 1957:

Indeed, let's be frank about it; most of our people have never had it so good. Go around the country, go to the industrial towns, go to the farms and you will see a state of prosperity such as we have never had in my lifetime nor indeed ever in the history of this country.²⁸

'You've never had it so good' and the workers' own "I am all right, Jack",²⁹ became the most appropriate noises of British society. This in a way meant that the 1950s were harking back to a new "Elizabethan age".³⁰ With nearly full employment, the young people particularly built their life-style around the pay-packet, the pub, and instant sex. The teddy boys with their drape jackets, duck's-arse hairstyles, winkle-picker shoes, loud juke-box rock 'n' roll music were not really "seekers" or "seers". The picture of this life-style has been faithfully presented in two well-known novels of the fifties, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*³¹ by Alan Sillitoe and *Room at the Top*³² by John Braine, which sold more than a million copies each in paperback. However, the spirit of intellectual adventure that writers like Hughes displayed was as remote from the self-satisfied consumerism of his age-group as it was from the self-pitying austerity of the generation before.

5 Ted Hughes: Vitality, not Violence

Hughes rejected this shallow sense of freedom. His programme was to celebrate not this mood of buoyancy but a far deeper sense of vitality, and occasionally to satirize the attitude of caution and withdrawal. His first two volumes, *Hawk in the Rain* (1957) and *Lupercal* (1960) are strongly marked by this celebration of vitality, which, unfortunately, has been widely misunderstood as championship of violence.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s Hughes's distance from socio-cultural norm in Britain increased further. He was thoroughly disgusted with "the psychotic democracy... our materialist, non-organic democracy". To him Adonis, who was "the rational septic, the man of puritan good order", and who had rejected Venus, "the great goddess of the primeval world", came to stand for "a typical modern Englishman". He expressed his impatience with the anaemic, cold-blooded, solipsistic contemporary British society:

Every society has its dream that has to be dreamed, and if we go by what appears on TV the perpetual tortures and executions there, and the spectacle of the whole population, not just a few neurotic intellectuals but the whole mass of the people, slumped every night in front of their sets... in attitudes of total disengagement, a sort of anaesthetized unconcern... watching their dream reeled off in front of them, if that's the dream of our society, then we haven't created a society but a hell. The stuff of pulp fiction supports the idea. We are dreaming a perpetual massacre. And when that leaks up with its characteristic whiff of emptiness and meaninglessness, that smell of psychosis which is very easy to detect, when it leaks up into what ought to be morally responsible art... then the critics pounce, and convert it to evidence in a sociological study. And of course it does belong to a sociological study".³³

Hughes's references to "the perpetual tortures and executions", "the stuff of pulp fiction" and "that smell of psychosis", emphasizing the sex-and-violence theme and the lack of meaningful joy, point at the concomitant evils of the affluent, advanced industrial society that Britain was at that time. In another context, Hughes refers to "the upper-crustish, militant, colonial-suppressive cast of the English intelligence"³⁴ against which Dylan Thomas revolted. It is evident that his view of the British society is most critical, not just since the 1950s, but, indeed, since the Civil War of 1642-1645, which he considers to be the great turning point in the development of human interrelation, the point "where negotiations were finally broken off" between the Anglo-Catholics and the Puritans, when the rational-puritan Adonis finally rejected the primeval mother Venus.³⁵ He traces the lack of vitality and animation in his contemporaries to their rational skepticism, materialism and the puritanical work-ethic, which, in his judgment, taught men to regard money-making as the sole object of their life.³⁶

Rejecting the consumerism and increasing narrowing of interest of modern Western society, Hughes opts for a more primitive (in the sense in which early man perceived his world) mystic and mythic mode of perception of reality. In his review of *Myth and Religions of the North* by E.O.G. Turville-Petre, Hughes tries to rediscover "where our real mental life has its roots, where the paths to and from our genuine imaginations run", and pointing to the pre-Christian Teutonic mythology concludes that "this particular mythology is much deeper in us, and truer to us... It's false to say these gods and heroes are obsolete: they are the better part of our patrimony still locked up".³⁷

6 A Psychotic Democracy

A perceptible shift is discerned in his responses to the social and moral ethos of the 1960s. In the preceding decade he said that unlike the Movement poets, who nursed the "mood of having had enough" as "they'd seen it all turn into death camps and atomic bombs", he "was all for opening negotiations with whatever happened to be out there".³⁸ But later his enthusiasm becomes somewhat chastened, society appears to him to be a "hell".³⁹ There has also been a subtle transformation in the body of his poetic material, in his images and symbols, and in his very way of looking at things. His attention has shifted from the predators to the victims: he is less preoccupied with vitality and trying more to understand and cope with the experiences of pain and suffering, of death and rebirth.

Now, if we seek to understand the reason for Hughes's disgust for "our psychotic democracy", and want to search for the genesis of his

dissociation from the values of affluent materialist society or of his conviction that the consumerist society is "a hell", we have to understand that it was not merely an idiosyncrasy that led him to this new position. True, his private life was deeply disturbed by personal crises and tragic events centring round Sylvia Plath's suicide in 1963. Grappling with shock and confusion, he experienced a writer's block and practically could not write any poetry except two or three poems for the next three years. Then there was another tragic accident in which his live-in companion and their daughter were killed.⁴⁰ But when he finally emerges out of the doldrums, his poetry appears to have taken in its stride the socio-cultural events and ideas of the late sixties and the seventies. A quick glance at the notable events and trends of the period may, therefore, help us to understand why his poetry from *Wodwo* onwards has a different dimension. Hughes himself believes that without such a look at the "biographical matrix" and the socio-historical roots of the aesthetics of a poet, one would find in his poetry "much less".⁴¹ In answer to a questionnaire in 1962, Hughes writes that a poet need not be directly concerned with "the great issues" of his time; but if he is "infinitely sensitive to what his gift is" and has "faith in it" and then tries to express his feelings honestly and in his own way, his poetry in the process will contain the imprint of those "great issues" of his time. He substantiates his point by analyzing the poetry of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Blake: "The important issues of the two decades following the French Revolution were, in England, overwhelmingly social and political, one would say", but the intense intellectual involvement of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Blake, apparently, "seems to have had very little to do, directly with their poetry". And yet, Hughes writes,

.... looking back now, if we wish to see the important issues of those two decades, we see nothing so convincing and enlightening to so many of us, as the spirit which seems to touch us openly and speak to us directly through these poems.⁴²

7 The Challenge of a Permissive Society

The social changes occurring in the sixties and the seventies were rapid and disturbing. The emergence of what is called the "permissive society", "in which some of the features of traditional Judaeo-Christian morality were successfully challenged",⁴³ was a most remarkable phenomenon in the late sixties in Britain. In 1968 the centuries-old office of the Lord Chamberlain as theatre censor was abolished. Consequently, books, magazines, plays and films became much more explicit in matters related to sex. This had been preceded by the Obscene Publications Act (1959), the famous *Lady Chatterley's Lover* trial (1960), and the subsequent

publication of an unexpurgated version of Lawrence's novel. Homosexual act in private between consenting male adults was legalized exactly ten years after it had been recommended by a Home Office committee under Sir John Wolfenden; the Abortion Act was passed in 1967 and the divorce law liberalized in 1969. These events seemed to sweep away many familiar older moral values and attitudes. Living together without going through the formality of a wedding was increasing. The younger generation, to which Jennifer and Janet in Hughes's *Guadete* belong, became less inhibited than their parents about pre- and extra-marital sex relations.⁴⁴

8 Feminism, Multiculturalism and Primitivism

The growth of a strong feminist or Women's Liberation movement during this period was another significant social phenomenon. It drew attention to the various discriminatory, unjust attitudes and arrangements imposed on women by the male-dominated society. The Equal Pay Act and the Sex Discrimination Act, both passed in 1975, helped remove some injustice. An Equal Opportunity Commission was set up to investigate allegations of discrimination. And yet these measures, the advocates of women's rights pointed out, left much to be desired.⁴⁵ It must be conceded that the Women's Liberation movement made people aware of the status of women in society, and forced them to change their attitude to women. A re-evaluation of the place of woman in history, myth and literature, as well as in society, seemed to have started. In Hughes's poetic cosmos, too, as in his aesthetic ideas, the figure of the Mother Goddess assumes an overwhelming presence.⁴⁶

During this period Britain was gradually transformed into a multi-racial society. Non-white immigration from the West Indies, the Indian subcontinent and the newly independent states of East Africa reached its peak in the late sixties. By 1976 the number of non-whites from the Commonwealth countries living in Britain made a little over three per cent of the total population. "The immigrants were visibly different from the indigenous population and", writes David Thomson, "in many cases brought with them quite different customs and life styles."⁴⁷ The impact of this phenomenon on the British social psyche was enormous. Popular fears about and prejudices against the coloured immigrants spread easily. The official response to this issue was "on the one hand, to condemn the prejudice ... and, on the other, to pander to it by progressively tightening controls upon immigration".⁴⁸ The Race Relations Acts of 1965, 1968 and 1976, the Commonwealth Immigrants Acts of 1962 and 1968, and the Conservative government's Immigration Act of 1971, all reflect this duplicity. Many suggestions have been offered from repatriation

to integration on the basis of equality, as practical and /or moral solution. But whatever the political response to it might be, contact and confrontation with other cultures, it might reasonably be held, have tended to relativize the monolithic nature of the imperial culture of Britain. This transformation in society presumably gave an edge to Hughes's academic interest in anthropology and archaeology and especially his continued and sustained interest in folklore.⁴⁹

Another important issue was the role of organized religion in society, which was generally declining in this period. As one commentator points out: "The churches still attracted enthusiasts, ... and occasional bursts of fervour remained possible. But generally people just neglected to think about religion".⁵⁰ Hughes himself seems to have had little sympathy for the Christian Church. In answer to a question, he indicates his affinity, although a little indirectly:

...there are now quite a few writers about who do not seem to belong spiritually to Christian civilization at all. In their world Christianity is just another provisional myth of man's relationship with the creator and the world of spirit. Their world is a continuation or a re-emergence of the pre-Christian world... it is the world of the little pagan religions and cults, the primitive religions from which of course Christianity itself grew.⁵¹

But if he rejected Christianity, he did not champion a secular, rationalist, pragmatic, instrumental outlook either, which had been gaining ground for more than three centuries. The secular view that "human and natural affairs can be explained (if at all) without the hypothesis of God"⁵² had been passing through a series of crises ever since the First World War, for both science and politics "had taken horrifying directions and neither offered a substitute for religion".⁵³ Revelation of Nazi atrocities, disillusionment with Stalinism, the suppression of the Hungarian revolt, the persistence of armed conflict in many parts of the world including some parts of the crumbling British empire, the constant threat of nuclear war—these did not exactly generate trust in man and his rational faculty; they rather tended to turn the mind towards natural or supernatural forces. Many intellectuals and creative writers expressed their reactions in terms that appeared to be obscurantist. As Colin Wilson, a contemporary of Hughes's, said: "We have seen enough of 'humanism' and scientific 'progress' to know how much they are worth" and therefore man must "fight his way back from the sense of meaninglessness and futility to a religion".⁵⁴ Hughes, too, believed that "the psychological stupidity, the ineptitude, of rigidly rationalist outlook"⁵⁵, that represses our archaic instinctual energies, is at the root of our troubles. With the influence of Christianity dwindling, Hughes came to find transcendental value in personal experience, in the "demolition of the old self with all its fortifications" and in the rediscovery of "atman".⁵⁶ In this way, then,

Hughes became convinced of the value of the ways of older, archaic cults and religions. He also came to believe that serious, profound literature, especially poetry, must deal with these issues, for "poetry is nothing if not that, the record of just how the forces of the Universe try to redress some balance disturbed by human error".⁵⁷

In sum, it can perhaps be said that if Hughes displayed a spirit of adventure and optimism that is natural to the younger generation of any given time and rejected the cautious calculating approach of crabbed age, he at the same time, rejected the egoistic consumerism of his own contemporaries and the hypocrisy of his Christian rationalist heritage to embrace a pristine, universal, original religion.

His preoccupation during the sixties and the seventies with myths and folklore, with *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, his interest in shamanism and Sufism, and his deep involvement with the contemporary poetry of East Europe, and the literature of the East in general, clearly point the direction to which his poetry would take in the following decades.

CHAPTER THREE

The Hughes Mindscape

1 Folktale and the Quest Mythology

One of the major factors that have shaped Hughes's poetic personality is his abiding interest since adolescence in mythology and folklore of different parts of the world. He said in an interview that he liked to read books dealing with myths and folktales as much as he liked to read novels.¹ This fostered in him a deep interest in other cultures, other ways of life. Partly because of this he gave up English Literature for studying Archaeology and Anthropology at Cambridge. Academic assignments like writing essays on Dr Johnson and others, which he was required to do as a student of the English tripsos, was deadening and choked the springs of his poetry². Diversion into the two disciplines of Anthropology and Archaeology revived his poetic imagination and widened his familiarity with the archaic world of mythology and folklore. There were other sources which contributed to his engagement in this area: Robert Graves's *The White Goddess*, which he received as a prize from his grammar school;³ W.B. Yeats's poetry and "other interests, folklore, and magic in particular"⁴; his curiosity in cabbalistic and Hermetic magic as well as his work on the *Bardo Thodol* or *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* for making a libretto of it in the late fifties and early sixties⁵; his work as a reviewer of a number of collection of folktales and fairy tales and books on shamanism, Sufism and allied subjects throughout the sixties.

Hughes's interest in the mythology and folklore of different cultures informs the shape and significance of his poetry. Although he says that "this whole business of influences is mysterious", he reveals that in his case "the influences that really count are most likely not literary at all", for "there are superficial influences that show and deep influences that maybe are not so visible. It's a mystery how a writer's imagination is influenced and altered"⁶. The mystery in Hughes's case is worth examining.

Hughes has described the "realm of mythologies" as "the realm of management between our ordinary minds and our deepest life"⁷. He has also expressed his appreciation of the efficacy of folktales, legends as well as myths in resolving inner problems.⁸ But besides commenting

on the imaginative impact and potential of myths and folktales, Hughes has also noted that numerous myths and folktales have the same "basic outline"¹⁰. This basic outline is shared by many epics and great narrative poems like the *Odyssey*, the *Divine Comedy*, *Faust*, *Venus and Adonis* and "Ash Wednesday". Hughes describes it as the basic experience of the romantic poetic temperament, as "the outline. . . of the Heroic Quest"¹⁰. Elsewhere Hughes states that "the fundamental myth of the epic and heroic legends" is analogous to "the archetypal journey to the bottom of the soul, . . . and the blueprint allegory of religious experience, as of mental and physical collapse and renewal"¹¹. All these remarks lead to the idea that the myth of the heroic quest is central to all archaic rituals, myths, legends and folktales, and to romantic poetry.

Has the basic outline of the quest-myth anything to do with the structural pattern of Hughes's poetry? The first two volumes of Hughes do not show much overt evidence of the pattern of the quest. However, in most of the important poems of *Wodwo* the quest has become the basic organising principle of Hughes. In some of these poems the pattern emerges complete while in some others it can be discerned only in fragmentary forms embodying one or the other aspect of the pattern¹². Hughes was not unaware of this. In the Author's Note to *Wodwo* he speaks of "a single adventure" and intends the verse and prose of the book to be read as "parts of a single work" (*W*, p. 9).

But in some of his major works since *Wodwo*—*Crow*, *Gaudete*, *Cave Birds*—this pattern becomes the poet's imaginative habit in matters of structural concern. One of his basic thematic concerns—the search for the integrated self of man—has been explored within the outline of this quest. This is not to say that he borrowed material in toto from those sources of myths and folktales. He noted striking parallels to and affirmation of his own preoccupations in the patterns of the existing body of mythology and folktale, and was encouraged to create a similar mythology in his own style. Occasionally, he also employed or alluded to in his poetry the existing mythical figures, events or situations; but he unmade and remade them to suit the specific contexts he had created. They did not appear in his poetry merely "as preserved harvests from the past"¹³. He did not lift straightaway any mythical material along with its fake context and then poeticize it; he wanted the pattern to emerge from the depth of his own psyche¹⁴, and re-created the myths. But in his re-creations the basic outline can still be identified as that of the Heroic Quest.

The point can be clarified with Hughes's own explanation of the relationship between the unpublished mythic folktale behind *Crow*¹⁵ and the poems in it:

So it is not the story that I am interested in but the poems. In other words, the whole narrative is just a way of getting a big body of ideas and energy moving on a track....Poems come to you much more naturally and accumulate more life when they are part of a connected flow of real narrative that you've got yourself involved in.¹⁶

The story, then, is merely a scaffolding, a point of departure, for the poems. Ideally, this background element should not have very important role in the appreciation of his poetry. Yet occasionally, familiarity with the mythical material and structure can work as an aid in unravelling the meaning of his poetry. Even when there are omissions, gaps and shifts in Hughes's mythology, the traditional pattern of myths and folktale can illuminate his treatment.

2 Monomyth

Hughes's concept of the Heroic Quest would seem to correspond to the particular species of heroic adventure that Joseph Campbell calls "monomyth", borrowing on Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*¹⁷. Bringing together a lot of myths and folktales from different parts of the world, and observing that there is little variation in "the morphology of the adventure, the character roles involved, the victories gained"¹⁸, Campbell proceeds to treat them in the form of "one composite adventure", involving a "composite" hero¹⁹. The hero is defined by Campbell as "a man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human form".²⁰ Such a hero illustrates in a symbolic way the destiny of every man. The hero's adventure in terms of departure/separation, initiation and return, is called "the nuclear unit of the monomyth"²¹. Campbell gives the following summary of the adventure:

The mythological hero, setting forth from his commonday hut or castle, is lured, carried away, or else voluntarily proceeds, to the threshold of adventure. There he encounters a shadow presence that guards the passage. The hero may defeat or conciliate this power and go alive into the kingdom of the dark (brother battle, dragon-battle; offering, charm), or be slain by the opponent and descend in death (dismemberment, crucifixion). Beyond the threshold, then, the hero journeys through a world of unfamiliar yet strangely intimate forces, some of which severely threaten him (tests), some of which give magical aid (helpers). When he arrives at the nadir of the mythological round, he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward. The triumph may be represented as the hero's sexual union with the goddess-mother of the world (sacred marriage), his recognition by the father-creator (father atonement), his own divinization (apotheosis), or again—if the powers have remained unfriendly to him—his theft of the boon he came to gain (bride-theft, fire-theft): intrinsically it is an expansion of consciousness and therewith of being (illumination, transfiguration, freedom). The final work is that

of the return. If the powers have blessed the hero, he now sets forth under their protection (emissary); if not, he flees and is pursued (transformation flight, obstacle flight). At the return threshold the transcendental powers must remain behind; the hero re-emerges from the kingdom of dread (return, resurrection). The boon that he brings restores the world (elixir)²².

The central episodes of this three-stage adventure of the hero are

- i. a ritual death, which symbolizes an inner crisis, a chasm in the hero's value-system; the onset of a sort of spiritual conversion;
- ii. a long process of dismemberment, decomposition and reconstitution of the essentials of the hero's nature; Hughes himself has referred to such a similar process variously, as a process of "nursing and repairing the damaged and threatened nucleus of the self", a "hermetically sealed process", "a long gestation" or 'regeneration', which in turn would ultimately require a "birth or a rebirth"; "an almost biological process", "a natural and positive process, if not the most positive and healing of all involuntary responses to the damage of life : a process of self-salvation—a resurrection of [one's] deepest spiritual vitality against the odds of [one's] fate";²³
- iii. finally, a return to everyday life with the realization of selfhood, with a peaceful reconciliation of the conflicting urges and energies, with an awareness of the powers of the new creative self.

Campbell's summary suggests that the framework of the adventure is quite flexible and can accommodate variations or omissions of certain subsidiary elements within it.

These themes of death, dismemberment and rebirth within an overall framework of the heroic quest can be traced in Hughes's poetry from *Wodwo* onwards. In his early poetry (*HR.* and *L*) he writes about man's fractured, devitalized existence with the animal images usually representing an unspoilt life of joy. But the poems do not show man as ever feeling the intense experience of ritual death or crisis or an intense longing for rebirth. Generally, men are complacent, desensitized, narrow, uncreative. Hughes here has attempted to locate the sources of the malady and the sources of energy. But until *Wodwo* he did not dramatize within a unifying framework the whole process of regeneration leading to a new life, the "birth of new self-conquering self",²⁴ except for a tentative attempt in an uncollected poem titled "Quest"²⁵:

I know clearly, as at a shout, when the time
Comes I am to ride out into the darkened air
Down the deserted streets. Eyes, terrified and hidden,
Are a weight of watching on me that I must ignore
And a charge in the air, tingling and crackling blueely.

From the points and edges of my weapons, and in my hair.
I shall never see the monster that I go to kill.

And how it is ever to be killed, or where it is,
No one knows, though men have ridden a thousand times
Against it as I now with my terror standing in my hair,
Hardly daring risk into my lungs this air the same
As carried the fire-belch and boistering of the thing's breath
Whose mere eye unlicked anywhere were a flame
To stir the marrow deep under most ignorant sleep.

I ride, with staring senses, but in
Complete blackness, knowing none of these faithful five
Clear to its coming till out of the blind-spot
Of the fitful sixth—crash on me the bellowing heaving
Tangle of a dragon all heads all jaws all fangs,
And though my weapons were lightning I am no longer alive.
My victory to raise this monster's shadow from my people

Shall be its trumpeting and clangorous flight
Over the moon's face to its white-hot icy crevasse
With fragments of my body dangling from its hundred mouths.

Keith Sagar speculates on a possible link between "Quest" and "Bayonet Charge" (HR, p.53), but at the same time comments on the greater "sweep, power and coherence" of the former, describing it as "a magnificent prophetic poem".²⁶ Indeed, it is not only that Hughes has drawn on imagery from mythology and fairy tale ("my weapons were lightning", "a dragon all heads all jaws all fangs", "the fire belch and blistering of the thing's breath") instead of modern warfare (the soldier's "hot khaki", "rifle fire", "shot—slashed furrows", "terror's touchy dynamite"). An important difference between the poems is that whereas the soldier in "Bayonet Charge" is running away from the battlefield, disillusioned about "patriotic tear" and "King, honour, human dignity etcetera", the hero in "Quest" is out to do battle with the invisible monster and "to raise this monster's shadow from [his] people". The poem may appear to anticipate Section III of "Gog" (W, p. 150-53); but the imagery and context of "Gog" suggest that "The blood-crossed Knight, the Holy Warrior" is intended to be a hubristic puritan Christian knight attempting to fight with his repressed instinctual urges, which have been turned into destructive and obscene forces (symbolized by Gog and the grail). The hero in "Quest" knows that his fight with the monster would entail his own death and dismemberment ("I am no longer alive", "With fragments of my body dangling from its hundred mouths"). But he is not yet able to envision the rest of the pattern—regeneration, rebirth, and return with the boon of awareness of the way out of the existential dilemma.

The true quester's voice is heard in "Wodwo", the title and concluding

poem of *Wodwo* (p.183). Wodwos are legendary characters from the Middle English romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, from which Hughes has quoted lines 720-24 as an epigraph to *Wodwo* (p.13). A quester has of necessity a sense of inadequacy. His adventure is for the attainment of completeness. Hughes has transformed Wodwo from merely one of the creatures with whom Sir Gawain fought into a quester-hero. Hughes imagines his Wodwo as "some sort of satyr or half-man or half-animal, half all kinds of elemental little things, just a little larval being without shape or qualities who suddenly finds himself alive in this world at any time"²⁷. A man without self-awareness can be very aptly symbolized by Wodwo. Hughes's Wodwo is out to find answers for his existential questions—the questions of his origins, his relationship to other forms of life and objects surrounding him, the meaning and purpose of his activities and perceptions:

Do these weeds
know me and name me to each other have they
seen me before, do I fit in their world? I seem
separate from the ground and not rooted but dropped
out of nothing casually I've no threads
fastening me to anything I can go anywhere
I seem to have been given the freedom
of this place what am I then?....

But what shall I be called am I the first
have I an owner what shape am I what
shape am I am I huge

The poem implies that in order to solve the baffling existential problems one needs a Wodwo-like approach, stripped of all preconceptions and predispositions, not conditioned by any artificial constructs or false rationalizations, open and ready to acknowledge all sensations as they come, with all their contradictions, as Wodwo is: "I suppose I am the exact centre/but there's all this what is it." One may also note the use of a pun in "am I huge" echoing the poet's own name. The search for "roots", for the sources of existence itself, can be very long and tiring but still one must "go on looking".

The best poems of *Wodwo* are all marked by this spirit of openness to experience, no matter how much painful, and a longing for going beyond it, to discover one's "roots". Many of these poems contain images of actual death, physical violence and disaster within the ambience of immediate personal history and beyond that, in the history of the world, even at the core of the cosmos. Both "Stations" and "The Green Wolf" open with the description of the death of a person. "You Drive in a Circle" presents the perception of existence as imprisoned inside a maze without any way out: "Where are you heading? Everything is already here./Your hardest look cannot anchor

out among these rocks, your coming days cannot anchor among these torn clouds that cannot anchor" (*W*, p. 173). "Pibroch" presents the sea as crying "with its meaningless voice", a pebble as "imprisoned/ Like nothing in the Universe", the wind "As able to mingle with nothing", a tree as struggling "to make leaves—/An old woman fallen from space..../She hangs on, because her mind's gone completely" (*W*, p. 177). "The Howling of Wolves" and Section I of "Song of a Rat" capture the horrible agony that all animals are heir to, both big and small. "The Warriors of the North" and "Wings" bring out the helpless self-estrangement, the loss of a unified sensibility initiated by Calvinism and perfected by the intellect-centric theories of Sartre, Kafka and Einstein. "Karma" presents the panorama of the cycle of human suffering, the endless succession of bitter events of history. In some of these poems there is an utter sense of unrelieved gloom, a sense that "Minute after minute, aeon after aeon,/Nothing lets up or develops" ("Pibroch", *W*, p. 177). But they only serve to bring into sharper focus the possibilities of creatively transcending this horror, all recorded in poems like "Skylarks", "Gnat-psalm", "Song of a Rat", "The Green Wolf", "The Bear", "Stations", "Wino" and "Full Moon and Little Frieda". Hughes intends that no one poem should be uprooted from the context of the whole book and interpreted in isolation; all the poems, along with the prose, "are intended to be read together, as parts of a single work" (*W*, p. 9); in other words, as aspects of the same pattern.

3 The East European Poets

This brings us to his affinities with the modern East European poets like Vasko Popa, Janos Pilinszky, Miroslav Holub, Zbigniew Herbert.²⁸ Ted Hughes wrote about Pilinszky:

Somewhere, in the pulsing mammalian nervous system, a last-ditch, make-shift miracle of consecration has taken place. The anguish is indistinguishable from joy. In locating the core of horror, or the precise point of impact, Pilinszky has located an extraordinary source of energy. The moment closest to extinction turns out to be the creative moment. So we feel, finally, no revulsion. The result is not comforting. But it is healing. Ghastliness and bliss are strangely married.²⁹

A similar experience begins to make its presence felt in the poems of *Wodwo*, becomes more and more prominent in subsequent works. It is very likely that Hughes was influenced by these poets and had glimpses of the possibilities of creative transcendence. These poets had lived through the experience of death-camps, mass murder, witch-hunt, and all the horrors of the twentieth century Inquisition. "They have managed", Hughes wrote, 'to grow up to a view of the unaccommodated universe,

but it has not made them cynical, they still like it and keep all their sympathies intact. They have got back to the simple animal courage of accepting the odds".³⁰ This view very much accords with Hughes's own vision of the vitality operating in Nature, as recorded in many of his early poems.

4 Folktale Surrealism

What is further noticed in his relationship with these East European poets is a convergence of inclinations and interests in the area of poetic craftsmanship. In his conversation with Ekbert Faas Hughes reveals that when he was about nineteen, he wrote for a while "Just little fables and anecdotes interpreting this, that and the other in a sort of plain, rough, almost flat way of going on". But then he simply abandoned in his published early volumes this style which "was a particularly natural and easy way of writing" for him.³¹ "Poems written in this style appear again in *Recklings*, in *Wodwo* and *Crow*. Hughes recalls: "So it wasn't an arrival at a style. It was just simply picking up a style that I had neglected earlier".³²

It is possible that Hughes's realization that he should write only in the style which was natural for him "rather than creating a coloured substance"³³, was confirmed by the example of the East European poets. He noted that Popa's favourite device was also "the little fable of visionary anecdote".³⁴ Popa's "marvellously effective artistic invention" can lead one to take resort to "the surrealism of folklore", which is always "urgently connected with the business of trying to manage practical difficulties". Folktale surrealism, unlike literary surrealism, never surrenders to the "arbitrary imagery of the dream flow". In its world, the problems are "dismantled", an improvised "air of trial and error exploration" is developed, and re-arranging in a pattern the constituent parts of the problem, a solution, which again "is always a practical one", is arrived at.³⁵ Such a pattern can be created within a single poem or may require a sequence of poems. So from *Wodwo* onwards, Hughes, like Popa, has developed his "habit of working" in cycle of poems.³⁶

The full fledging of this style can be observed in *Crow*. But in *Wodwo*, too, "the wide perspective of general elemental and biological law is spelled out with folklore hieroglyphs and magical monsters",³⁷ which stand for the outlines of little fables of visionary anecdotes. In "The Green Wolf", *W*, p. 40) for instance, the image in the title, and both the hawthorn blossoms and the bean flower, evoke the atmosphere of primitive myths. The ritual of throwing a man, dressed as a green wolf into the Beltane fire in Normandy was undertaken as a magical rite for the renewal of life in nature.³⁸ Besides, both the hawthorn and the bean

are associated with the White Goddess³⁹ who is by turns destructive and creative. Death of an individual is transformed into a richly symbolic process of nature with the possibilities of a new birth: "One smouldering annihilation/Of old brains, old bowels, old bodies/In the scarves of dew, the wet hair of nightfall" (*W*, p. 40).

"The Bear", similarly, evokes the shaman's world of spirits. A bear by devouring an apprentice Eskimo shaman's flesh enables him to contemplate his own skeleton.⁴⁰ He has a vision of his own ritual death and dismemberment. Many primitive tribes regarded the bear as their ancestor. They worshipped their ancestors who, they believed, still roamed around. Thus the bear in Hughes's poem becomes "the ferryman/To dead land", an instrument of a cruel process of decomposition which is a necessary prelude to rebirth: "The bear is a river/Where people bending to drink/See their dead selves". But creative transcendence demands the experience of the moment to be closest to extinction, a vicarious experience of death: "His price is everything".

It is when a man is totally dispossessed of all his old trappings, which can be expressed only through the metaphor of death, that he can have the hope for a new kind of life. The pattern is not far to seek. "Skylarks" (*W*, pp.168-71) dramatizes the pattern within its structure of short sequences. When the skylarks are on the verge of death, having lived life to the full, "When they've had enough, when they're burned out /And the sun sucked them empty/And the earth gives them the O. K.", they have an intimation of the significance of death:

And maybe the whole agony was for this
The plummeting dead drop.

Here death is looked at from a new perspective: death becomes the situation par excellence when one realizes, with the intensest suffering, the possibilities and power of life, and locates a deep source of energy that makes survival possible. As Hughes says, "the moment closest to extinction turns out to be the creative moment" and therefore "the anguish is indistinguishable from joy".⁴¹ When the skylarks experience this moment, "they relax, drifting with changed notes". With the completion of their quest, they keep singing a song that is "incomprehensibly both ways—/Joy! Help! Joy! Help!". This death is equivalent to a new birth, survival becomes a new existence: "Like men come back from the dead they have an improved perception, an unerring sense of what really counts in being alive".⁴² So the skylarks will not be awed into ignoble fear:

But just before they plunge into the earth
They flare and glide off low over grass, then up
To land on a wall-top, crest up,
Weightless

Paid-up,
Alert,

Conscience perfect.

5 Sufism, Shamanism, the Bible, Alchemy

Hughes's concern with the question of rebirth—to be wide awake to all that hurts and yet to transcend the fear of suffering and death, to live in love for “the elemental final beauty of the created world”⁴³—stems from his interest in various occult practices and mystic cults like shamanism, Sufism and alchemy. The relevance of shamanism to the appreciation of Hughes's poetry has been discussed by almost all the major critics of Hughes.⁴⁴ But his interest in Sufi literature—its poetry, ideas and techniques—and its role in giving shape and significance to his poetry has received comparatively little attention from scholars. Ekbert Faas in his useful Appendix to his book on Hughes has included extracts from Hughes's review of Mircea Eliade's *Shamanism* but completely omitted Hughes's enthusiastic review of Idries Shah's *The Sufis*, which was published together with the former.⁴⁵ Leonard M. Scigaj has attempted to explain the presence of oriental elements in *Wodwo*, but makes no mention of Sufic elements and images in it.⁴⁶ Keith Sagar refers to Hughes's discussion of the Sufis' refined course of moral self-development and self-annihilation and their life infused by “the living substance of Allah, the power of Creation” and points to its close correspondence to what Hughes “is attempting himself in the Epilogue of *Gaudete*”⁴⁷. Graham Bradshaw, too, refers to Attar's Persian poem *The Conference of the Birds*, which Hughes worked on for over a year with Peter Brook's actors, as “one of the five main strands of allusion that are blended together in *Cave Birds*”, and analyzes the parallels to be found between the two works.⁴⁸ Apart from *Cave Birds*, there are some Sufic metaphors and images in *Wodwo*, such as, grape, wine, journey, “stations”, sea (as a symbol of the Divine essence), “surrender to total Emptiness”, etc; and although there is no direct borrowing in *Crow*, its general plan and structure are indebted, to some extent, to the model of Attar's poem.⁴⁹ In this way it will be seen that from *Wodwo* through *Crow* to *Cave Birds*, Sufism is one of the major shaping powers in Hughes's poetic career.

Explaining the utility of “using stories as educational implements”, Hughes wrote: “In his many publications of Sufi literature, Idries Shah indicates how central to the training of the sages and saints of Islam are the traditional tales. Sometimes no more than small anecdotes, sometimes lengthy and involved adventures such as were collected into the *Arabian Nights*”⁵⁰. Highly impressed by Idries Shah's *The Sufis*, Hughes reviewed it in 1964 and summed up by saying that “the Sufis, fifty million strong, must be the biggest society of sensible men there has ever been”. This may sound a bit effusive, but is not entirely without reason. Hughes felt

that after reading Shah's book "one would almost be inclined to say that Shamanism might well be a barbarized, stray descendant of Sufism", and tarot cards, the secret societies, Rosicrucians, Masons, "the Kabbalah", etc., "originated among the Sufis, and represent degenerate, strayed filterings of the doctrine". He seemed to agree with Shah that "their major poets—Hafiz, Rumi, Ibn El-Arabi—are not merely among the greatest poets in the world's history, but seem to have provided much of the material and inspiration for the greatest of the West".⁵¹

A good deal of such "material and inspiration" is to be found in Hughes's own poetry in *Wodwo* and subsequent volumes. Some of the principal concepts of Sufism, particularly "fana" ("dying-to-self") and "baqa" ("continuance", "life-in-Him")⁵², help to elucidate the meaning of "Stations" and "Wino" in *Wodwo*. The title "Stations" corresponds to a technical term in Sufi literature, "maqamat" (singular "maqam"). Gifford and Roberts note this correspondence,⁵³ but do not follow up the point in the analysis the poem. A. J. Arberry defines "maqam" as a "station", or "a stage of spiritual attainment on the pilgrim's progress to God".⁵⁴ Sufi thinkers count a number of stations on this journey of the mystic⁵⁵, which ends in the union of his own essence with the Divine Essence. Hughes's "stations" do not correspond exactly to those of the Sufis. Nor is Hughes's poem a statement of the Sufi idea. The experiences described in "Stations" are Hughes's own, but they evoke those of the Sufis.

Although the title "Stations" evokes the idea of a journey or quest, the poem opens by describing the death (terminus) of an individual. Attar, the Sufi poet, "used the theme of "journey" or "quest" as an analogy of the successive stages of the human soul in search of perfection".⁵⁶ So death in the beginning becomes a symbolic death, the death of the ego, of the old way of life, which echoes the concept of "fana". However, Hughes's lines have all the touches of common life, the suddenness and death:

Suddenly his poor body
Had its drowsy mind no longer
For insulation

Before the funeral service foundered
The lifeboat coffin had shaken to pieces
And the great stars were swimming through where he had been.

For a while
The stalk of the tulip at the door that had outlived him
And his jacket, and his wife, and his last pillow
Clung to each other. (*W*, p. 38)

The drowsy mind indicates a state of nominal awareness. It filters out most of the sensations that after all matter. It acts like an insulating material between the body and the sensations. This is the condition of

our mortal life. At death the drowsy mind takes leave of the "poor body" ("poor", because it was hardly awake to the real sensations), creating an opportunity for full awakening and awareness. When life's ship is wrecked, the body is sought to be preserved in a coffin, as lifeboats try to do in a rescue operation. The funeral service, an attempt at giving safe conduct to the soul, itself founders as the lifeboat falls apart, and the soul is released in a fluid space wafted about by the swimming stars.

The second section of "Stations" suggests that man is a collection of fragmented pieces, wreckage of a fuller entity, his dryness in the middle of the sea only an indication of his apparent safety and comfort, for he cannot quench his thirst with all this surrounding water. Here the image of the sea stands for man's origin. Man has lost the sense of his relationship with Nature, the maker of his life. The Sufis, too, believed that man originally rose from the sea and then passed through many forms of existence in his evolution as has been described in two well-known poems of Jalaluddin Rumi.³⁷

One can end this fragmented state of existence by annihilating the ego and living in a state of "love", as a master Sufi does.³⁸ The station "fana" ends on the verge of a state of ecstasy. A Sufi usually passes beyond this stage and enters the stage of "baqa", where he finds himself totally liberated, reborn in ecstasy and creativeness. This is a positive stage. Hughes himself has spoken of the Sufis' "annihilation" of themselves "into the living substance of Allah, the power of Creation",³⁹ which in Sufi literature is referred to as "love" ("ishk"). After rebirth an accomplished Sufi remains fused in love, "lives this love"⁴⁰, as Hughes puts it. The crucial section III of "Stations" [in the *Wodwo* version] is evocative of such a station in the soul's journey:

You are a wild look—out of an egg
Laid by your absence.

In the great Emptiness you sit complacent
Blackbird in wet snow.

If you could make only one comparison—
Your condition is miserable, you would give up.

But you, from the start, surrender to total Emptiness,
Then leave everything to it.
Absence. It is your own
Absence

Weeps its respite through your accomplished music,
Wraps its cloak dark about your feeding. (W. p.38-39)

The "you" in this section is compared to a "blackbird". A bird as a symbol for the inner being or soul is a commonplace of Sufi poetry: Attar's most famous work is titled *The Conference of the Birds*. "Black"

also carries the sense of "wise".⁶¹ So the "blackbird" may be taken as symbolizing a wise, pure, liberated self. The image of the "wet snow" reinforces this sense of purity achieved after a ritual new birth. This condition cannot be described in discursive language. No analogy can be its equivalent. The self has to give up its attempt to compare this station to anything; it feels miserable, as it is unable to create a vehicle for the tenor of his condition. It is expressed with a negative term, "emptiness". Surrendering to total Emptiness (the phrase recalls the etymological meaning of the term "Islam": submission to the will of God) may mean, in conceptual terms, total immersion in the Unity of Being, going beyond the dualistic categories of good and evil and achieving a sense of the wholeness of the self. After the surrender to Emptiness, the soul becomes an "absence"—another negative term employed to describe a positive state of fullness. The new self is called "absence" because in it is absent his former ego. "Absence", the transformed self in ecstatic joy "Weeps its respite" from remaining engrossed in historical time. It is interesting to note that Freud also used the word "absence" in the sense of "psychic alteration" which a patient undergoes during an attack of hysteria or under hypnosis which amounts to a different life.⁶² Besides, the positive state of "love" in mystical literature is often described in negative terms. As, for instance, William James quotes Boehme on Primal Love:

...it fitly may be compared to Nothing, for it is deeper than any Thing, and is as nothing with respect to all things, forasmuch as it is not comprehensible by any of them. And because it is nothing respectively, it is therefore free from all things, and is that only good, which a man cannot express, or utter what it is, there being nothing to which it may be compared, to express it by.⁶³

Though the experience of this mystic "love" is indescribable in rational terms, an attempt can be made to communicate it through ecstatic music, as Sufis often do, so that the integrity of life in this station ("Your feeding") remains inviolate, "wrapped in mystery".

However, this ecstatic experience is transient. The "respite", the moment which is both in and beyond time, like Eliot's "still point", cannot be sustained beyond a very short duration⁶⁴. So the poem ends with a section that again implies the irreversibility of death.

This drama of annihilation and rebirth is enacted again in "Wino" in an imagery and tone steeped in Sufi experience:

Grape is my mulatto mother
In this frozen whited country. Her veined interior
Hangs hot open for me to re-enter

The blood-coloured glasshouse against which the stone world
Thins to a dew and steams off—
Diluting neither my blood cupful

Nor its black undercurrent. I swell in there, soaking,
 Till the grape for sheer surfeit of me
 Vomits me up. I am found
 Feeble as a babe, but renewed. (W, p. 33)

A wino is "a habitual drinker of cheap wine, an alcoholic or drunkard, especially one who is destitute" (OED). In this poem he can be identified as the "Kharabati", or "tavern-haunter", a familiar figure in Sufi poetry⁶⁵. The tavern-haunter feels suffocated in the world of cold reason, rigid form and heartlessness ("this frozen whited country", "the stone world"). So he seeks refuge in wine, in Sufic or Dionysian ecstasy. Arberry, quoting a Sufi authority, notes that wine (sharab) in Sufi literature is a bringer in of "ecstatic experience due to the revelation of the True Beloved, destroying the foundations of reason"⁶⁶. The ecstatic experience is one of becoming more and more sanguine, soaking in the heady delight, protected in the prison "glasshouse" from the stolid world, which ultimately melts down and evaporates. The prison is the womb ("mother", "veined interior", "hot", "open", "re-enter", "blood"), the incarceration is gestation ("swell", "soaking", "surfeit" indicate the foetus and "vomit" suggests delivery). Withdrawal ceases to mean escape when we understand what is being rejected ("frozen whited country") is abominable and after withdrawal there is renewal without loss. But this ecstatic experience cannot be sustained forever. The ecstasy ends when the surfeit is unbearable and a new soul is born with violent ejection. In Sufi poetry, too, according to Arberry, tavern ("Kharabat") stands for "pure unity ('Wahdat'), undifferentiated and unqualified," and the tavern-haunter for "the true lover who is freed from the chains of discrimination, knowing that all acts, and the qualities of all things, are obliterated in the Divine Acts and qualities".⁶⁷

The poem exudes a sense of triumph over anxiety, depression and sterility, of hope and exultation. Such imaginative exercises perhaps helped Hughes to overcome his own spiritual crisis. Generally speaking, mystic experiences have a direction towards optimism. William James notes:

We pass into mystical states from out of ordinary consciousness as from a less into a more, as from a smallness into a vastness, and at the same time as from an unrest to rest. We feel them as reconciling, unifying states. They appeal to the yes-function more than to the no-function in us. In them the unlimited absorbs the limits and peacefully closes the account.⁶⁸

He also notes that this triumphant awareness of oneness is common to all mystic cults and creeds. James continues,

In Hinduism, in Neoplatonism, in Sufism, in Christian mysticism, in Whitmanism, we find the same recurring note, so that there is about mystical utterances an eternal unanimity which ought to make a critic stop and think, and which brings it about that the mystical classics have, as has been said, neither birthday nor native land.⁶⁹

Hughes's interest in the question of death and rebirth is an extension of his belief in the life-death-life continuum, and later takes him to his exploration of Eastern mystical poetry and what he calls "the spirit of the East."⁷⁰

The Bible

Although *Crow* was meant by Hughes to be a kind of alter-Bible, it cannot be denied that the Bible was one of the principal formative influences on Hughes's mental world. Although he readily confesses to his admiration for a specimen of "the greatest poetry ... in the prose of the Bible"⁷¹, he has no less preoccupied himself with its content in his own poetry. Claire Hahn, showing in a detailed analysis the parallels between the Biblical creation myths and the episodes in *Crow*, comments: "Hughes reinterprets the central mythic pattern of the Bible; his narratives deal with the creation of man and woman, the fall in the garden, the importance of language, art and science, the suffering of the Son of God, and the ultimate destruction of the world."⁷² But Hughes is not interested merely in presenting an antithesis to the Creation—Fall—Flood and Pestilence—Social and Creative Concern—Redemption—Apocalypse" formula. His vision of the world, perceived through *Crow's* eyes and experience, is after all getting on to yet another world, the world to be attained through sharing the vital principle of life with the rest of Nature which, he believes, has been suppressed by the wrong assumptions and interpretations of the Bible by, chiefly, Reformed Christianity.⁷³

Alchemy

The subtitle to *Cave Birds*, "An Alchemical Cave Drama", indicates Hughes's interest in yet another ancient lore and throws a hint on how to approach the poems and the accompanying Baskin drawings. A question might arise: how far do the magical ideas and practical techniques of alchemy inform the structure of *Cave Birds*? Must we understand these techniques and ideas first in order to understand the meaning or the organization of the sequence, or, for that matter, the relationship between the poems and the pictures? It would have been ideal if taking recourse to such methods could be dispensed with, but as matters stand, many points in *Cave Birds* remain obscure unless lighted up from the angle of alchemy.

Alchemy developed as the art of the land of the black earth—the Egyptians called their land Khen, which means black earth. It was not, as believed by many, merely the technique of transmuting base metals into silver or gold; it was, in reality, a system of philosophy. As Mircea Eliade puts it:

It ... was not, in its origins, an empirical science, a rudimentary chemistry. This it did not become till later when, for the majority of its practitioners,

its mental world had lost its validity and its *raison d'être*.... Chemistry was born from the disintegration of the ideology of alchemy.⁷⁴

But it must at the same time be admitted that nor is it a wholly spiritual discipline. Alchemical operations were not merely symbolic; they were physical operations carried out in laboratories, but the purpose and nature of these operations were different from those of the practical chemist. The chemist tries to penetrate the structure of matter. "The alchemist", Eliade points out, "is concerned with the 'passion', the 'death' and the 'marriage' of substances in so far as they will tend to transmute matter and human life. His goals were the Philosophers' Stone and the Elixir Vitae".⁷⁵

The basic idea of alchemy (combination and transformation) was dear to all shades of mystics. The Sufis used its terminology as metaphors for all their experiences, and Ghazali even called his most important book *The Alchemy of Happiness*.⁷⁶ In China the concept of alchemy was given yet another dimension: "The 'impure' transcendental metals are identified with different parts of the body, and the alchemical processes, instead of being realized in the laboratory, take place in the consciousness of experimenter".⁷⁷ Following this direction it is only logical to discover the overlaps between yoga, especially tantric Hatha-yoga and alchemy. Both the yogi and the alchemist aim at "purifying" their "impure" materials, transmuting them into a noble element, free and immortal. Both posit an experience of initiatory death and resurrection. Both strive to dominate base matter by changing its "ontological regime".⁷⁸

Chinese alchemy and Indian yoga direct our attention to "internalization of rites and physiological operations".⁷⁹ But in Arabic and Western alchemy, the developmental process is described in terms of colours and conditions of transforming matter. Ted Hughes's dramatization of the progress of the self in terms of an alchemical process is a fine example of syncretism of the two traditions of alchemy.

The alchemical process—whether the domain is philosophical or practical—is presumed to pass through a certain sequence of stages. The first task⁸⁰ is the search for the "Materia Prima", known by tradition as the Stone of the Philosophers. This "becomes the Philosophers' Stone only when, transformed and perfected by the art, it reaches its ultimate perfection and consequent transmutative quality". This Materia Prima has two principles within—one solar, hot and male, known as sulphur; the other lunar, cold and female, known as mercury.

Another preliminary task is the preparation of the secret fire, "Ignis Innaturalis", described by alchemists as the First Agent. Then the First Matter, mixed with the First Agent and moistened with dew, is put in a mortar. The compost is then enclosed in a hermetically sealed vessel or Philosophic Egg, which is then placed in the Athanor, the furnace

of the philosophers. The Athanor is then lit up to keep the Egg at a constant temperature. The external fire stimulates the inner fire, and the two opposite principles of the *Materia Prima* interact. Then through a long process, the opposites are dissolved in the liquid "nigredo". And from the mutual destruction of the conjoint opposites, the Mercury of the Wise appears and the first stage is completed. After several repetitions of the processes of distillation, coagulation, desiccation and solidification the colour whiteness ("albedo") is reached. In the next step the King or Sulphur of the Wise emerges out of the womb of his mother and sister, Isis or Mercury.

The third step is a repetition of the first: dissolution of Sulphur and Mercury, both now purified. The *Materia Prima* has now acquired sufficient strength to resist the ardours of the external fire. The third step begins with the pomp of a royal wedding: the King is reunited in the Fire of Love (the secret fire) with his blessed Queen; and from their re-union the ultimate perfection is effected and the Philosophers' Stone is born.

In a note to the *Cave Birds: An Alchemical Cave Drama*, Hughes says:

The poems plot the course of a symbolic drama, concerning disintegration and re-integration, with contrapuntal roles played by birds and humans. Throughout the original sequence the inter-dependence between drawings and verses is quite close.⁸¹

The dramatization of this process of "disintegration and re-integration" of the protagonist of this "symbolic 'drama'", supervised by some therianthropic and theriomorphic beings, has close resemblances to the alchemical opus concerning the transformation of the Stone of the Philosophers into the Philosophers' Stone. This is not to say, however, that the suffering, initiatory death and dismemberment, and resurrection of the protagonist of *Cave Birds* conform to all the stages of an alchemical operation in a pattern of one-to-one correspondence. It is suggested only that many images and terms from various alchemical traditions, along with motifs and elements from the world's folklore and mythology, have been employed here, within a broad alchemical framework, and a unique drama of the progress of the human self has been forged.

There is no reason to think that Hughes, by employing either sufistic or alchemical symbolism, was out "to make a trophy of it". It is true, as he says of *Crow*, that the "comparative religion/mythological background was irrelevant" to him if he "couldn't find it again original".⁸² Without becoming a practising occultist, a Sufi or an alchemist, Hughes could still use spontaneously the general framework of mythology, folklore, mystic cults and the like as an organizing principle and a continent of ideas to explore. He is then inspired to dramatize the dynamics of the human psyche against a landscape of those ideas like a cryptic Bunyan. He rediscovers the cultural symbols and in the process achieves not only

a personal regeneration but also a cultural renaissance. The problems of the human psyche in the context of an evolving society and culture become then more tractable and comprehensible.

6 Hughes's Prose : the Search for the Unified Self

While we are concerned with the intellectual cosmos of Hughes, it may be useful to examine his intellectual grappling, in some of his prose writings and interviews, with the nature of the basically unified self and the nature and origin of the various false dichotomies like body and spirit, nature and reason, Venus and Adonis, which are also the philosophical kernel of his poetry.

When he was asked about the nature of his implied search suggested by the phrase "a single adventure" in the Author's Note to *Wódwo* (p.9), he had the following to say:

I suppose I am searching for what everybody is searching for: I am searching for ways to confront myself. Because ... in the West, our history has resulted in a psychology where human beings very easily lose touch with themselves. Sounds ridiculous, of course, but it is the condition of most Westerners that they are no longer in touch with their real self, their own selves. And it is everybody's task in the West—and I suppose in the world actually, but certainly it's an acute cultural preoccupation in the West: it's the business of confronting what really matters with your self, what really matters.⁸³

Hughes's idea of the self, however, is not to be thought of as an abstract concept. It concerns man's conflicting relationship with the inner and the external worlds. In an essay entitled "Words and Experience", discussing the tangled nature of human experience, Hughes feels that our one-sided intellectual and rational preoccupations with only the external world has made the problem more complicated by preventing us from making sense of our inner events, of "exactly what is going on in and around us". He says that "to live removed from this inner universe of experience is also to live removed from our self, banished from our self and our real life" and therefore, "man's struggle to possess his own experience" is really the struggle "to regain his genuine self".⁸⁴

Hughes argues that the nature of our experience is determined by the constant interaction and collision of the two worlds, the inner and the external, "and our life is what we are able to make of that collision and struggle". In response to outer circumstances, our body's innumerable "raw perceptions" excite by turns "a host of small and larger feelings, in a turmoil of memory and association". Hughes describes the process thus:

We can guess ... that all these involved processes, which seem like the electrical fields of our body's electrical installations—our glands, organs, chemical transmutations and so on—are striving to tell about themselves. They are all trying to make their needs known ... They are talking

incessantly in a dumb radiating way, about themselves, about their relationships with each other... and also about the outer world, because all these *dramatis personae* are really striving to live, in some way or other, in the outer world. That is the world for which they have been created. That is the world which created them. And so they are highly concerned about the doings of the individual behind whose face they hide. Because they are him. And they want him to live in the way that will give them the greatest satisfaction.⁸⁵

Three points are to be noted here:

- i. The components of the inner world of the body, the archaic energies of instinct and feeling including hunger and sex, the instincts of self-preservation, procreation and continuity, are, in the ultimate analysis, created by the physical world—not by a supposed devil or demon or an evil force from beyond the physical universe.
- ii. These two worlds are inextricably connected and inter-dependent. In one sense, they “are not contradictory at all; they are one all-inclusive system”.⁸⁶
- iii. Finally, the demands of the body must be heeded, accepted into life—not refused, rejected or suppressed—and turned to good, to creativity. Otherwise, as he implies, they would destroy us.⁸⁷

Hughes believes that the ancient religions and the mythologies and legends were projections of man's inner and outer world or “large-scale accounts of negotiations between the powers of the inner world and the stubborn conditions of the outer world, under which ordinary men and women have to live”.⁸⁸ The rituals developed by them were methods of opening imaginative negotiations with those worlds, of reconciling them “in a workable fashion”. But now those rituals have lost credibility. Man has now become a victim of what Lawrence called “our pettifogging *apartness*”.⁸⁹

For this tragic situation Hughes fixes the responsibility on “the rising prestige of scientific objectivity and the lowering prestige of religious awareness”.⁹⁰ By “religious awareness” he means the spirit of the ancient, pre-Christian religions. Hughes argues that after the rise of Protestantism, and in England particularly during and after the Civil War (1642--45), Christianity failed to play its proper role in bringing about in man an awareness of the undivided self. The Catholic Church could have checked the rift between the inner and outer world through its mythic rituals. Hughes specifically mentions the “presence of the great Goddess of the primeval world, which the Catholic countries have managed to retain in the figure of Mary”, which can reconcile the inner disharmony.⁹¹

Hughes tries to make the point that Protestant Christianity has only precipitated the crisis of duality within man by associating the evil within human nature with the devil or the serpent and by urging man

to do battle with it, for, such an attempt to fight against our own nature is bound to fail. By associating the evil in human life with woman (Eve's eating of the forbidden fruit), Christianity has set man against his own mother, against the source of his origin, against sex. "The fundamental pattern," argues Hughes, "was made within Protestant Christianity that the devil, woman, nature were out of bounds".² Hughes implies here that this disowning a part of our nature will not cure our neurosis, will not remove our bad conscience and the feeling of guilt and sin. We need to own up our whole nature as belonging to us, to understand our nature, to recognize that the energies of our nature must be put to good use. Man needs, as Jung says, "to know how he is to reconcile himself with his own nature—how he is to love the enemy in his own heart and call the wolf his brother".³

Hughes further traces a link between the rise of Protestantism, especially Puritanism, and that of science and the rationalist-materialist philosophy, which have combined to cut human life off its roots in the living physical cosmos:

It's no accident that puritanism, and the puritanical outlook, runs absolutely parallel to the materialist, scientific outlook, because both oppose the whole world of nature, which is of course what we have to live in, what we are part of, what we grow out of.⁴

Blind to the requirements of the inner world, our modern scientific ideal, Hughes points out, has rejected the inner world and religion "as a bundle of fairy tales, a relic of primeval superstition" and has turned it into "an inferno of depraved impulses and crazy explosions of embittered energy". The camera, Hughes's analogue for "the mechanism of objective perception",⁵ is completely incapable of having any feeling for the totality of human needs. Thus, devoid of any understanding of our deepest urges and feelings, "all we register is the vast absence, the emptiness, the sterility, the meaninglessness, the loneliness".⁶

Hughes seems to suggest that the modern mass society, with its mass production, mass consumption, and mass media, of which the television and the pulp fiction are Hughes's symbols, administers on man an emotional anaesthesia, forcing him into "attitudes of total disengagement, a sort of anaesthetized unconcern". We watch "the horrors and inanities and killings that jog along there" on the television under the spell of a complete passivity.⁷ It seems man has surrendered to the pressure to survive the immediate moment without any emotional involvement and moral responsibility. Man appears to be a mere object, interchangeable with other objects and easily dispensable.

Such a view of the present-day human attitude may appear to be rather extreme, and may therefore be open to controversy. But there may not be much disagreement about Hughes's main contention that mass culture has greatly contributed to the fragmentation of the self.

and has made it very difficult for man to regain his authentic, integrated self by quickening the disintegration of the faculty of imagination. It has been aided by the loss of sensitivity that was reflected in ancient religious experience, and the emergence of a narrow inflexible outlook of scientific objectivity, by compounding what Hughes calls "a huge sickness".⁹⁸

It would be unfair to conclude that Hughes is advocating rejection of science and revival of obscurantism replete with ancient rituals and myths. He says:

There's no question of ...abandoning science, though that seems to be what a lot of people would like to do. But a technological civilization is useless, and dangerous, unless it is handled by imaginative minds, or by minds that can move as freely in their imaginations as they can move among facts.⁹⁹

This of "imagination" is neither the objective imagination of science, nor the subjective imagination which is specifically developed for penetrating into the inner world only. It is

a faculty that embraces both worlds simultaneously. A large, flexible grasp, an inner vision which holds wide open, like a great theatre, the arena of contention, and which pays equal respect to both sides. Which keeps faith, as Goethe says, with the world of things and the world of spirits equally... The faculty that makes the human being out of these two worlds is called divine. That is only a way of saying that it is the faculty without which humanity cannot really exist. It can be called religious or visionary. More essentially, it is imagination which embraces both outer and inner worlds in a creative spirit.¹⁰⁰

This imagination can be found operating in the great works of art. The greatest artists have restated the laws of human nature by activating this imagination in one medium or another throughout the ages. And Hughes believes that "it has to be done again and again, as circumstances change, and the balance of power between outer and inner worlds shifts, showing everybody the gulf".¹⁰¹

All this may lead to the conclusion that in this age of shriveling imagination our only hope to regain the genuine self lies in "art—music, painting, dancing, sculpture, and the activity that includes all these, which is poetry".¹⁰² Just as ancient mythologies and rituals negotiated between the inner and outer worlds, now, poetry may take up that role. "This it seems to me", writes Hughes, "is what poetry is continually trying to do, to realign our extreme exclusive attitude with our natural environment and our natural biological supply of life".¹⁰³

CHAPTER FOUR

THE EARLY ANIMAL POEMS

"the master-Fulcrum of violence..." (*HR*, p. 11)

Hughes has too often been accused of writing "poetry of violence", and by implication, of glorifying and endorsing violence. The genesis of this charge seems to lie to a great extent, in the fact that Hughes has written quite a great number of powerful poems—their technical accomplishment is hardly disputed—with predatory animals as their subject.

Use of animal imagery to represent human attributes is as old as the fables and folktales. In English literature the use has been wide and varied from Chaucer and Shakespeare through Ben Jonson and Webster down to D. H. Lawrence. In the hands of almost all these writers, the animals are metaphors for human attitudes and behaviour, generally of the negative kind (like savagery, cruelty, lust, deceitfulness and greed) and only occasionally of the positive kind (like gentleness, innocence, love, trustfulness). Hughes's poems on animals (birds and beasts and fish and worm) are objective studies, in the first place, of objects of study, without any desire to sentimentalize or rationalize the behaviour, or even to attach to anyone a permanent evaluative label. They are almost as detached and as accurate as scientific nature study. They only get a human significance because of the use of human metaphors and brush-lines in the sketching of the objects. In that sense the studies have subjects, but are never subjective.

Probably it is such total detachment (absence of explicit condemnation more than presence of approval) that is the reason behind the assumption that Hughes lends a tacit support to the behaviour described. Hughes's preoccupation with the subject further reinforces the misunderstanding and many critics and readers are led by the belief that lack of moral comment means endorsement. The problem is further complicated by the fact that in poems where Hughes uses animal metaphors for describing human behaviour ("A Modest Proposal", *HR*, p. 26 and "The Dove Breeder", *HR*, p. 24), he uses violent aspects or violent agents (wolves and hawk) to describe the consuming passion of love in the human heart. This is believed to be a denigration or degradation of the positive human attributes, or, to be, by implication, an elevation and worshipping of

the base animal instincts. Either way, such non-conformism appears shocking and repugnant to Christian-rationalist sensibilities.

But it will be noticed throughout that Hughes's basic attitude is one of acceptance of the reality, of perceiving the facts of nature without any desire to colour or extenuate, of calling a spade a spade. John Horder's remark that Hughes "manages to face and explore a wide range of animal feelings which most of us prefer to ignore" is very perceptive, but not so acceptable is his very next line, "This he does with some underlying cynicism and resignation"², for both these mental frames are negative and regressive whereas Hughes's response to his subject is that of a seer inspired by his vision of truth and beauty blended. His animals live "the redeemed life of joy", they are "continually in a state of energy which men only have when they've gone mad. This strength arises from their complete unity with whatever divinity they have"³. People who associate, all too easily, violence and madness have to remember that godliness and madness are also related.

Hughes, however, sees animals in an original way; the kind of animal poems he writes belongs to a different tradition which, originating in Blake, "had crystallized into a genre long before Hughes appeared". Holderlin, Tennyson, Rilke and D. H. Lawrence, among others, studied the power, energy and single-mindedness of animals in relation to the "absence of mentation" in them. "Superiority of the instinctual life of animals over man's rationalizing grayness", a position held by Lawrence, has become quite a familiar theme in literature that now forms "an integral part of an entire philosophico-religious conception and evaluation of civilized man."⁴ But Hughes's perception is rather different from even Lawrence's.

Hughes's animal poems are philosophic in the quality of their detachment which is not mere photographic representation. The portraits are vivid with penetrating accuracy, but the angle of vision evokes certain resonances which give them certain metaphorical and symbolic significances. To ascribe to them simply the attribute of violence would be arbitrary, for the very term may have different connotations in different cultures and different value systems. What is regarded as violence in one culture or context may be regarded as "an act of piety", as socially necessary in another.⁵ To judge the action of an animal in pietistic-democratic terms can be misleading. It is necessary to be able to distinguish predatoriness of animals from the destructive covetous behaviour of man in contemporary society, from "mere anarchy . . . the blood-dimmed tide", in Yeats's haunting phrases.⁶

In "Thrushes" (*L*, p. 52), for instance, Hughes suggests that predatoriness in these birds is phylogenetically programmed, accurately aimed, purpose-determined, the purpose being living by food gathering: their "delicate

legs/Triggered to stirrings beyond sense". Their "bullet and automatic /Purpose" is never deflected by distracting hesitations. Such efficiency and single-minded dedication (also to be noticed in geniuses like Mozart) thrive at the cost of others, or may even be suicidal, but are always geared to a goal—this is what Hughes perhaps had in mind in the line "continually in a state of energy which men only have when they've gone mad."⁷ Speaking about a true poet, Zev Barbu says that in a psychological sense, he represents a prototype of violent action and style of life, a professional structure-breaker, at least in terms of feelings and language".⁸ This is applicable to the genius of great creative artists like Mozart as well as to the fusion of instinctual energy and purpose in the thrushes ("Strikes too streamlined")—both life-enhancing works. It is not merely gratuitous indulgence of a self-consuming passion but rather following the drive of the life force.

This is basically different from ordinary man's self-conscious activities, his self-worship bereft of the "divinity" of instinctual energies. Man takes pride in publicizing his "heroic" acts, his painstaking plodding work at the office desk or on some objet d'art. This has a deadening and destructive effect on his life of the senses. Pandering to his vanity, modern man denies his inner urges free play. These deprived urges then are transformed into "distracting devils", fill his open skies with wild cries and his private retreat with deep sorrow. The "Furious spaces of fire" calls forth the image of modern nuclear war which is the logical manifestation of the perverted desires and forces within man. The wilderness suggests a deep inner source of energy which has remained untapped. John Lucas, who discovers Lawrentian and even Nietzschean, tendencies in Hughes's preoccupation with violence and "scorn of ordinariness" condemns him because "the consciousness of violence comes to us unmediated", because the egotistic lust for power "is not challenged from within the poem". This is typical of the rectitude displayed by the Christian-rationalist line of thinking which suffers from a sense of remissness until it has made the appropriate noises, no matter how hypocritical they may be. If a dramatist is praised for withholding moral commentary and asking the playgoer to judge for himself, why must the poet be obliged to mediate and challenge from within the poem?

"Thrushes" reveals the subtle distinction between violence that is found in the animal world and man-made violence. The former aids continuation of life, while the other is destruction for its own sake; in short, "benign aggression" and "malignant violence" respectively.⁹ Hughes himself explained his position: "My poems are not about violence but vitality. Animals are not violent, they're so much more completely controlled than men. So much more adapted to their environment.

Maybe my poems are about the split personality of modern man, the one behind the constructed, spoilt part."¹¹

"The Jaguar" (*HR*, p. 12) for instance, functions on several levels. Hughes's description of the animal, which is different from all others in being a bundle of restless energy, in mechanical ("drill") and electrical ("short fierce fuse") terms not only establishes it as an elemental power, it also suggests how lethal the animal is. It has a penetration and blinds with a flash. It itself is blind in rage, its blood has shot into the brain, making it deaf, too. The rage, the immense physical power and the fascinating lithe beauty of the jaguar, are all focused in a close-up view of the animal, but the evocative and associative language of the description acquires metaphorical and symbolic significances. The image of the jaguar "hurrying enraged / Through prison darkness", whose "stride is wildernesses of freedom", turns into a metaphor for man's primal energies, hidden in his unconscious, unable to come out in a civilized world dominated by the ego and the superego, controlled by our "voices of education", to use Lawrence's phrase.¹² The last two lines of the poem, "The world rolls under the long thrust of his heel. / Over the cage floor the horizons come", encapsulate in the jaguar a cosmic force that imbues the whole limitless universe. When "horizons", which are merely an illusion of circumference, come over the cage floor, the raging spirit really strides the whole world, breaking besides, notionally, the bounds of the cage. In one panning shot the earth and the sky meet, the planet rolls like a ball under the jaguar's heel, and the animal bounds over the ever-receding horizon. He is like the visionary who stalks the entire universe in his imagination. It is not the gory sight of violence inflicted purposelessly on the victim that fascinates the poet—it is the blending of power, beauty, freedom and otherworldliness that is the theme.

Such dramatization of animal power sends out waves of thought and feeling across time and space. In "Macaw and Little Miss" (*HR*, p.13), the last three lines, "Instantly beak, wings, talons crash/The bars in conflagration and frenzy,/And his shriek shakes the house", produce the image of an atomic explosion (flash of fiery plumes and ear-piercing hoot) of repressed masculine energy. Another image, that of the "Volcano, swearing to vomit the world away in black ash,/And would, one day", again evokes the resonance of violent cosmic forces.

In "Meeting" (*HR*, p. 41) the eye of the black goat is compared to "a living hanging hemisphere" which watches the narcissistic man's "blood's gleam with a ray/Slow and cold and ferocious as a star". This association with celestial objects and forces transforms the goat into another symbol of the cosmic force; a close encounter with it ("What gigantic fingers took/Him up and on a bare/Palm turned him close under an eye") turns the man's self-satisfied claim of shrinking "the

whole/Sun-swung Zodiac of light to a trinket shape" or to "outloom life like Faustus" into silly, empty bombast and even a doomed bid.

In "View of a Pig" (L, p. 40), the sight of the carcass leaves the viewer cold; it generates no feeling about a live creature. When Hughes says, "It was less than lifeless, further off./It was like a sack of wheat", he conveys the feeling that when we turn some living object into food, we do not think of it any more as having life once. It becomes something inanimate, whether it is pork or cereal. Hughes maintains a matter-of-fact tone and language throughout—there is no feeling of remorse or pity, no memory of the pig's playful, lively dirty nature, the gash may be "shocking, but not pathetic". It was going to be scalded and scoured "like a doorstep" in preparation for the table. Now, such a view of the pig may be interpreted as perverse pragmatism—but would not any sentimentalizing be hypocritical?

In "Pike", (L, p. 56) Hughes presents the fish as a destructive predator that devours other fish, even its own kind, remorselessly and ruthlessly. It is a compulsive eater, "killers from the egg", and prefers to lodge in deep dark crevices (Stanza 3). It keeps on growing by eating till it is eaten by another—sometimes two pikes locked in a suicidal death-lock. The pond where the narrator goes fishing is "as deep as England". It is the deep dark pond of the racial history of England infested with these huge horrible killers, the dreadful records of aggrandizement that lurk under the surface of the civilized genteel world ("Stilled legendary depth"). But the apprehension of the killer instinct in the racial nature does not amount to painting the whole nation with the same brush. Wary and apprehensive of "what might move" and overtake him, he yet casts his net in search of the right fish watched by his prehistoric "dream/Darkness beneath night's darkness" slowly rising towards him (shadows of Wordsworth's huge and mighty forms in the boating incident in *The Prelude*¹³.) Hughes's tone here does in no way glorify "rapaciousness" although Lucas notices it. It is strange that while admitting that Hughes has created "an atmosphere tense with a hidden, withheld menace", Lucas still smells "something suspect" about Hughes's use of animals "to explore issues as complex as the history and use of power and violence."¹⁴ It is with a sense of shock and horror ("With the hair frozen on my head/For what might move, for what eye might move") that Hughes writes about it and the accusation of endorsing violence just seems wilful.

This can be said also of "Hawk Roosting" (L, p. 26), perhaps Hughes's most controversial poem. The poem, of course, poses a rather complicated problem. The hawk appears to be a combination of Jehovah of the Hebrews, Caesar of the Roman Empire and Hitler of the Third Reich. His right to rule in his own way is, according to him, unquestionable and that way is highly peremptory ("I kill where I please") and barbaric

("My manners are tearing off heads"). The presenter's comments are completely withheld and the reader is to respond to the sentiments expressed all on his own.

But it is not that the poet's sympathies cannot be discerned at all. As the first-person account of a resting ruminating hawk, the poem has all the elements of a dramatic monologue. The rhythm and the tone convey the easy conviction and the sense of authority, but the over-emphasized egotism and unmitigated expression of imperiousness make it out to be a dramatic portrayal. To say that the poet's personality is identified with his persona is to ignore the subtext of the poem.

The problem emerges from here, from the first-person narrative technique. Since the hawk articulates its thoughts in strident terms, it appears to be not merely a "drowsy hawk sitting in a wood and talking to itself"; it rather sounds like "a fascist... some horrible totalitarian genocidal dictator... like Hitler's familiar spirit". The poem is not concerned with photographic observation; it is rather a credo and manifesto. The unifocal vision of its destructive spirit makes the hawk the symbol of just the opposite of what Hughes probably intended it to be. He wanted it to serve as the symbol of "some creator like the Jehovah in Job but more feminine". Jehovah in Job is conceived as both a destroyer and sustainer, and so, Hughes suggests, can be equated with Nature or Isis.¹⁵ However, modern man, brought up in rationalist-humanist tradition has lost touch with this conception of a unified, creative-destructive deity, and knows only of a benevolent God. The destructive aspect of the Creator has been separated and designated as the Devil. That is why the hawk now appears to be like devil incarnate, a fascist, an arch destroyer.

The possibility of such a misconception is there in the poem itself. Hughes himself points out that Blake's "Tyger", and Yeats's rough beast in "The Second Coming" are potentially dangerous symbols, but thinks that they do not harm our ethical judgment because they are presented within specific contexts. Blake's tiger "arrives with its own control—it is yoked with the Lamb, and both draw the Creator". And Yeats's symbol of Anti-Christ is fixed in context by "an ironic pointer"—"towards Bethlehem".

Because of this contextual control, readers of these two poems can take the violent symbols as embodying the violence that is pre-requisite to the ushering in of an era of happiness. Hughes points out "there is a line in the poem ["Hawk Roosting"] almost verbatim from Job"¹⁶; but the modern reader's inability to locate this allusion leaves the poem without any contextual control. So the proper way to evaluate the poem is to unravel its subtext. The uninhibited arrogance, unashamed self-eulogy, glorification of destructive power, putting oneself above everything

else (the trees, the air, the sun, the earth, and the whole of Creation)—are these really adorable qualities? Does any one of these endear a person to others? Is there any evidence in the poem that the poet is trying to present them as adorable qualities? In fact, Hughes is merely holding the mirror up to nature for the viewer to judge for himself.

But the best answer to this accusation comes from a later poem called "Tiger-psalm" (*M*, pp. 150-51). The poem's strategy is to develop a contrast between the tiger's mode of killing and that indulged in by man with mechanized weapons like machine-guns. By extension, it develops into a contrasting study of the purpose and behaviour of predatory animals and that of modern man. With increasing intensity the poem delves deeper and deeper into the meaning of the tiger's killing; it kills only when it is "hungry"; it kills "expertly", "frugally", "with beautiful colours in his face", "Kills and licks his victim all over carefully". These metaphorical implications and descriptive details are all along contrasted with the way machine-guns bring about destruction on earth; it is interesting to note that the verb "kill" is never used in association with the machine-guns. The machine-guns "Talk, talk, talk across their Acropolis", "Carry on arguing in heaven/Where number's have no ears, where there is no blood"; "They go on chattering statistics", "Proclaim the Absolute... In a code of bangs and holes"; they "snigger", "eliminate the error/With a to-fro dialectic/And the point proved stop speaking". This utter lack of concern ("They are not interested") and cynical doling out of death is juxtaposed with the tiger's "blessing with a fang", what Hughes once described as the tiger's "sacred activity of life".¹⁷ Following this crescendo the poem reaches its climax when the poet concludes that the tiger "Does not kill". The tiger's violence is seen as a way of discovering "The tiger within", of being one with its true being, which is also "the Tiger of the Earth",—a creature that belongs to and epitomizes the functions of the Earth. The same cannot be said of the other agent of violence and destruction—the machine-gun. One will be reminded of Blake's masterpiece in which the tiger was Blake's symbol of Energy, of the abundance of natural life. Modern men, alienated from this true spirit of life, indulge in senseless destruction here and there, leaving a "crust of blood hanging on the nails/In an orchard of scrap-iron", evocating an action as horrible as the crucifixion in an age of modern technology. This is criticized as "violence as pure expression of spirit, violence as assertion of identity". But Lucas only contradicts himself by saying that Hughes's fascination with the phenomenon of violence "amounts to an endorsement of it", since he has already said that Hughes is entitled to "explore the lust for power and violence which is part of the story of twentieth century (and perhaps all human) experience".¹⁸

It is a measure of the strength of Hughes's imagination that in a post-

holocaust era he did not seek to evade or wish away the issue of violence; but from the very beginning of his poetic career he concerned himself to explore its roots, the "inaudible" "battle-shouts/And death-cries" ("To Paint a Water Lily" *L*, pp. 29-30), in the dark depth of human nature. He discovers that animals and plants—the whole world of the living cell—share with man the presence of this "prehistoric bedragonned times" (*L*., p. 29), this irrational force which can be abused as "violence" only mistakenly. Animals hardly ever misuse it by attempting to exterminate members of their own species or by otherwise indulging in it for its own sake. But, he discovers, this force has gone awry in man because of his peevish, hypocritical or vain attempts to suppress it ("Secretary", "Egg-Head", "Meeting", *HR*., and "The Perfect Forms", *L*.). The suggestion that emerges from all these poems is that man can neglect negotiating with this force only to his own detriment. From this perspective, Ian Hamilton's scoff at "Ted Hughes's bestiary" or derisive remarks like "the fevered, apocalyptic rhetoric" of *The Hawk in the Rain* and "the naive, generalizing commentaries on human conduct ... inserted here and there in *Lupercal*"¹⁹ appear to be sweeping generalization. Any student of human life who is also a poet has to attempt to rediscover and re-state in his own individual style the important truths and issues of man's life. Viewed in this light, M.G. Ramanan's charge that "Hughes's violent imagery is closely aligned with authoritarian politics", particularly of the variety, which, as John Lucas glosses it, "is an essential element of Thatcher's England"²⁰ seems to be completely beside the point.

Among his early poems, "The Thought-Fox" is the only poem which is primarily not an objective study of an animal. Undoubtedly it is a tour de force and in many ways a unique poem; however, as Keith Sagar says, "Obviously it is an animal poem; but it is also, perhaps primarily, something else. The opening words of the poem 'I imagine' confirm what we have already been alerted to in the title, that this is not, primarily, a poem about a fox, but a poem about writing a poem, about the kind of thinking which produces poems, or produced them for Hughes at that stage of his career."²¹

Ted Hughes's use of the image of the fox on several other occasions invests the creature with special significances, making it to be a totem animal for Hughes: it can guide him in his chosen path, in his spiritual and aesthetic journey; it can help him to draw out his creative energy and fulfil his life's mission. In "The Burnt Fox" Hughes describes his dream in which he saw the strange figure "that was at the same time a skinny man and a fox walking erect on its hind legs", just stepping out of a furnace, its body and limbs were all "roasted, smouldering, black-charred, split and bleeding" and eyes dazzling with intense pain. It pressed down its burning and bleeding palm on the blank space of the foolscap paper on which he was writing the last essay for the

examination and facing the usual "inexplicable" and distressing resistance that he had been experiencing during the two years of his academic pursuit of English at Cambridge University. "'Stop this—you are destroying us'", the fox said to him.²² The whole dream-sequence may suggest that under the pressure of writing critical essays on Dr Johnson et al Ted Hughes had been destroying the imaginative powers within him, suggesting as if critical and creative faculties cannot coexist.

Similarly "Epiphany" in *Birthday Letters* also hints that the fox-cub represents a shamanic call to the poetic vocation coming from within some depth of his inner life. He felt that the eyes of the fox-cub was "reaching out/Trying to catch my eyes—so familiar!". Its eyes were peering at him, as if pleading him:

the eyes still small,
Round, orphaned-looking, woebegone
As if with weeping. Bereft
Of the bluemilk, the toys of feather and fur,
The den life's happy dark. (*BL*, p. 114)

Ted Hughes could not bring the fox-cub home fearing to cause dislocation to domestic peace and everyday routine. He apprehended that his wife—a young harried mother with a baby—might be displeased: "What would you make of its old smell/And its mannerless energy?" Then he includes himself—"A new father—slightly light-headed/With lack of sleep and the novelty"—in this doubt: "What would we do with an unpredictable,/Powerful, bounding fox?" (Significantly, the fox is associated with boundary-crossing power, unpredictability, and primitive, wild and natural—as opposed to artificial, civilized—manners). So he let the fox-cub go along with the young fellow who was carrying it and "Then I walked on/As if out of my own life". It seemed to him he failed in some fundamentally deeper way to respond to the call of his unconscious needs, to tap the source of creative energy; he failed to respond to the shamanic call of the spirit world, the matrix of his poetic imagination. Here he speaks of the failure of his marriage; the "marriage" may indicate not only his marriage with Sylvia Plath, but also union with his inner needs, his finding out the happy congenial hunting ground for poems, his successful union with the resources of poetic creations. As he says:

If I had grasped that whatever comes with a fox
Is what tests a marriage and proves it a marriage —
I would not have failed the test....
But I failed. Our marriage had failed. (*BL*, p. 115)

So he remained confined within the narrow sphere of everyday domestic concerns, within the limits of the profane, evading the call of the divine energies, creative energies embodied in the fox.

In *Poetry in the Making*, too, he speaks of capturing animals as a metaphor for writing poetry: "...these two interests, capturing animals and writing poems, have much in common. . . . I think of poems as a sort of animal. They have their own life, like animals. . . ." The process of writing poems is just like hunting or fishing "and the poem is a new species of creature, a new specimen of the life outside your own".²³

Writing poems, therefore, like hunting, needs concentration and connecting to what is lurking in the depth of one's unconscious. In "The Thought-Fox" the poet waits alone at midnight darkness as if sitting in the midst of a dark forest. He is like a shaman waiting for the appearance of a spirit. Or it is like an Ouija session reminding us of the sight of Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath sitting in front of the Ouija Board in darkness summoning a spirit. There is in front of him a piece of blank page on which his finger is moving ritualistically. Slowly he becomes aware of the presence of some living thing, an organic substance, a spirit. Gradually the presence of the living thing acquires an outline of its distinct shape—that of a fox. At first tentatively, delicately, its "nose touches twig, leaf". Then it raises the two eyes, searches for the way forward. The rhythm and movement of the verse, controlled by the deft use of punctuation marks, imitates the initial uncertain, hesitant, wary movement of the fox slowly growing in confidence and boldness:

Two eyes serve a movement, that now
And again now, and now, and now

Sets neat prints into the snow
Between trees, and warily a lame
Shadow lags by stump and in hollow
Of a body that is bold to come

Across clearing, an eye,
A widening deepening greenness,
Brilliantly, concentratedly.

Coming about its own business... (HR, p. 15)

The repetition of the phrase "and now" sounds like the noiseless thud of the fox's steps and the run-on lines visualize the relentless onward march of the fox: it advances, pauses, looks around to be sure that everything is safe, and then takes another step forward. The march of the fox ends with its entering "the dark hole" of the poet's head with "a sudden sharp hot stink of a fox". The choice of an olfactory image ("hot stink") is an unerring touch to make the intangible elusive fox a real one with all its hairy smelly physicality. But simultaneously with the fox's entry into the head of the poet, the blank page in front of him is printed, presumably, with a poem. The space inside his head and the space on the page are thus suggested to be identical. It follows from this premise that the fox and the poem on the page are identical, too. So

the poem is not just "about a fox", the fox is the poem; the fox is "both a fox and not a fox. ... It is both a fox and a spirit"²⁴. Indeed, a poem for Hughes is also a spirit, a spirit that brings a cure for some psychophysical illness. The poet, like a shaman, journeys to the underworld of his consciousness and searches for the healing spirit. After some patient coaxing the spirit-poem appears, at first nebulously, then unmistakably; the full form of the living specimen emerges clearly from another world. This is how Ted Hughes describes the arrival of a poem:

The special kind of excitement, the slightly mesmerized and quite involuntary concentration with which you make out the stirrings of a new poem in your mind, then the outline, the mass and colour and clean final form of it, the unique living reality of it in the midst of the general lifelessness, all that is too familiar to mistake.²⁵

"The Thought-Fox" is not only about the poetic process but also portrays the structure of a poem: the poem's body involves the fox's nose, eyes, its cumulatively increasing number of footprints on the snow, sharp stink as well as the twigs, leaves, clearings of the forest—all suggesting the words, images, punctuation marks, stanzas and the space between stanzas and their complex interplay in a poem.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE MALIGNANT VIOLENCE

"The cenotaphs on my mother's breasts." (*W*, p. 157)

Violence in its usual sense of mere destructiveness, in which civilized men have immersed themselves too often, is acutely felt and presented in Hughes's poetry, as it has been done in a large bulk of twentieth century drama, fiction and poetry.¹ Hughes is certainly not wallowing in, or sensationalizing, such violence. His treatment of the theme of social horrors and psychological viciousness is informed by the belief that a poet must make an effort, as did Keith Douglas, against "self-regarding complacency, . . . cant, the indulgent self-deprecation that passes in this country for charming good manners...[and] all posturing and superciliousness".² Such an effort, it is implied, may shock people out of these genteel vices.

Hughes's "war poems" in his first book ("The Casualty", "Bayonet Charge", "Griefs for Dead Soldiers", "Six Young Men", "Two Wise Generals", "The Ancient Heroes and the Bomber Pilot", *HR*, pp. 51-60) and "Wilfred Owen's Photographs" in *Lupercal* (p.45) are all inspired by such a passionate faith. In "The Casualty" (*HR*, pp. 51-52) a sense of outrage is suggested by the callousness of people's response to war casualties: "Farmers in the fields, housewives behind steamed windows" watch "the burning aircraft" fall but "wait with interest for the evening news". Some of them come to the place of the crash and peep down "as if they expected there/A snake in the gloom of the brambles or a rare flower". The poet wonders how "close complacency" of people can remain like an "unscratchable diamond" even in the wake of a disaster. Although they have feelings like those of "tourists", yet they remain confused, their "Sympathies/Fasten to the blood like flies", they feel "Greedy to share. . . / Grimace, gasp, gesture of death". The horror, moreover, is reinforced by the images of the astonished pheasant and the hare "that hops up, quizzical, hesitant,/Flattens ears and tears madly away", and the wren uttering a cry as if in warning: the violence in the human world creates only "astonishment", fear and foreboding in Nature.

In "Bayonet Charge" (*HR*, p. 53) Hughes dramatizes the bitter contrast between the noble and "patriotic" feelings with which the

soldier had gone to the battlefield and his disillusionment later: "The patriotic tear that had brimmed in his eye/Sweating like molten iron from the centre of his chest." All his previous fondly-nurtured dreams and ideals crumble in the wake of fear, bewilderment and exhaustion:

King, honour, human dignity, etcetera
Dropped like luxuries in a yelling alarm
To get out of that blue crackling air
His terror's touchy dynamite. (HR, p. 53)

In "Two Wise Generals" (HR, p. 58), Hughes presents an ironical picture of "two timid and aging generals" who pride themselves on their difference from the Black Douglas "Who hacked for the casked heart flung to the enemy/Letting the whole air flow breakneck with blood/Till he fell astride." Black Douglas was a Scottish hero, the sixth Earl of Douglas, William. Two ministers of King James II (who ruled Scotland from 1437 to 1460) set a trap for Douglas. He and his brother David were invited to Edinburgh Castle to meet the young king. At dinner the Douglas brothers were seized, hurried into the castle-yard, and beheaded (1440). The two generals "drank, joked, waxed wise", surreptitiously signed treaties, divided "the territory/Upon a map" but later found "their sleeping armies massacred". The pity of the war (annihilation of two armies) is heightened by the selfishness and discomfiture of the generals. They will probably be wiser now, after the act.

In "The Ancient Heroes and the Bomber Pilot" (HR, pp. 59-60), the modern hero contrasts the magnitude of horror that he can bring about with that perpetrated by the ancient heroes. The ancient heroes riding on chariots fought with their swords. They increased their fame with "fresh sacks-full of heads" and went back "over the wet moor". But the bomber pilot is "pale" to think that although "The enemy capital will jump to a fume/At a turn of his wrist/And the huge earth be shaken in its frame," his feat, would not be savage or gory enough. In contrast to this wholesale, instantaneous destruction, the ancient warriors seemed to have a "grandeur" that humbled his thought. Thinking of "their fat fulsome blood in war/Replenishing both bed and board", the bomber pilot's heart can be only "cold and small". If a tinge of admiration is noticed in the way the bomber pilot recalls the exploits of the ancient heroes, it is on account of the kind of savagery they practise, although it is not easy to decide which kind is more horrible.

"Six Young Men" (HR, pp. 56-57) brings home to the readers the pity of war by presenting the contrast between the leisurely mood of the six young men in the photograph, the pre-war idyllic setting of Edwardian and Georgian England in which the photograph was taken and the most casual but brutal manner of their death in the trenches. "That bilberried bank, that thick tree, that black wall/. . . the water of

seven streams..../The leafy valley"—nothing has changed from what they were forty years ago. The smiling faces or the hands of those bright young men—one is "bashful", "one chews grass", another one is "ridiculous with cocky pride"—have not wrinkled. Yet this "faded and ochre-tinged" photograph reveal "war's worst/Thinkable flash and rending." The infectious smile that has remained unchanged in the photograph must have "turned overnight/Into the hospital of his mangled last/Agony and hours" and has been "rotting into soil" for forty years. Indeed, contemplating this photograph one may suddenly find one's own existence turn meaningless, even absurd:

Such contradictory permanent horrors here
Smile from the single exposure and shoulder out
One's own body from its instant and heat.

The poem underlines the fact that even after four decades, the ravages of the First World War are too brutally present, haunting the existence of the survivors. It reminds one of what Hughes said in a review of an anthology of war poems: "The first world war goes on getting stronger, our number one national ghost. It's still everywhere, molesting everybody."³

In "Griefs for Dead Soldiers", Section I, Hughes's polysyllabic diction ironically brings out the insincerity, hollowness and ludicrousness of the public show of "national sorrow" on the occasion of the unveiling of a cenotaph. The "Monstrousness of the moment making the air stone" is appalling, for it is assumed that the grand ceremony can "Make these dead magnificent." The greatest irony is that "the crowds that know of no other wound" would perhaps think that "the national sorrow" has been turned into a "Permanent stupendous victory" by this pompous spectacle. In the next section, his focus zeros in on the sorrow of a war widow. "The bared/ Words [that] shear the hawsers of love that now lash/ Back in darkness, blinding and severing" not only refer to those of the telegram carrying the news, but also to those uttered by the public figure in Section I. For, unlike them, "She cannot build her sorrow into a monument /And walk away from it." Though to her lonely existence "The doors and windows open like great gates to a hell", she still has to "carry cups from table to sink." Her "world smashed", she has to live in a vacuum with her memory which makes her life such a horror:

Closer than thinking
The dead man hangs around her neck, but never
Close enough to be touched, or thanked even,
For being all that remains in a world smashed. (HR, p. 55)

But if any sentimentality is generated in this picture, it is dissipated by a reminder of the naked brutal consequences of war, by the dispassionate manner in which the grave-diggers are working at the

mass grave

Where spades hack, and the diggers grunt and sweat.
 thud of another body flung
 Down, the jolted shape of a face, earth into the mouth—
 Moment that could annihilate a watcher! (HR, p. 55)

These people are working silently, they are not haranguing about their sorrow, they have no political axe to grind; nor do they have any personal sense of loss. Their grief is the "Truest, and only just" one because their silent grief, detached from any motive, "could annihilate a watcher", could shock a man to a sense of recognition of the horror perpetrated by, to use Hughes's words from the review cited above, "the mechanical generals, the politicians, the war-profiteers, everything brass-hat and jingoistic both civilian and military."¹

The effectiveness of demonstrating silent evidences of horror "to incite political action"² is the theme of "Wilfred Owen's Photographs" (L, p. 45). The title has baffled many readers, for, the poem deals with an incident in the House of Commons in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.³ The Irish M.P.s under the leadership of Charles Stewart Parnell pressed for the abolition of the British Navy's cat-o'-nine-tails but faced stiff opposition and taunts: "To discontinue it were as much/As ship not powder and cannonballs/But brandy and women". Then "A witty profound Irishman" presented a real sample of the instrument of torture; the gentry were shocked and finally, "queitly, unopposed,/The motion was passed".

Wilfred Owen intended to exhibit in London a collection of "photographs of the trenches, emergency operations, and the like, to drive the actuality of the front-line sufferings into the faces of those safe in England."⁴ Linking the action of Parnell's followers to Owen's intended exhibition of photographs, Hughes obliquely emphasizes the efficacy of facing evidences of horror in order to oppose it.

Hughes did not have any first hand experience of the action in the front. But as a boy he grew up in a surrounding which was heavy with the memories of the First World War: "A disaster seems to hang around in the air there for a long time. I can never lose the impression that the whole region is in mourning for the First World War."⁵ Besides, the "brain-scarred accounts"⁶ of his father who had gone to fight on the beaches of Gallipoli and survived, made him imaginatively live through the experience: "Cordite ooings of Gallipoli, ... broached my palate" ("Mayday on Holderness", (L, pp. 11-12). But for him this war was not merely a personal disaster, he was aware of its wider social implications. As he wrote:

On those battlefields the main English social issues surfaced and showed their colours. An English social revolution was fought out in the trenches.... The enemy was not German. For four years, France was like

England's dream world, a previously unguessed fantasy dimension, where the social oppressions and corruptions slipped into nightmare gear.

The poetry of the First World War, of which he was an attentive reader, never allowed him to forget that "we are still in the living thick of it, as well as being far out of it."¹⁰ Later, the poetry of Keith Douglas who was killed in the Second World War deeply impressed Hughes. He identified as the most important quality of Douglas's poetry "his special brand of honesty, which is also courage and also an obsession to get the facts down clear and straight, with no concessions to the so-called poetry."¹¹ In his own poems on war Hughes tries to emulate this honesty.

In another group of poems, Hughes dwells on the manifestation of disharmony, violence, savagery and mindless destructiveness on domestic as well as social levels. All these poems—"Her Husband", "Kreutzer Sonata", "Boom" "Karma", "Out" (all from *Wodwo*), "Crow's Account of the Battle", "Crow's Account of St. George", "Lovesong" (from *Crow*)—reveal great variety in style and tone, and all of them suggest that the root of the malady is in modern man's lack of awareness of a unity between the external world and his inner world, the unconscious urges of the psyche.

Psychoanalysis, having exploded the myth of the rational character of human nature, has shown that reason, intellect, enlightenment cannot contain the instinctual energies. The attempt to dominate imagination by rationality has turned man's inner energies into destructive forces. But modern civilized man has deluded himself with the concern for rationality, progress and enlightenment and has tended to remain blind to the real state of his nature, projecting the evil on others who are alleged to be possessed by the devil. So he has totally neglected the task of understanding his true nature and has foolishly searched for happiness by refusing to negotiate with his inner cravings, by trying to improve and better only the external world, by accumulating clever gadgets to improve the standard of living on the physical plane. But such attempts have led only to inner emptiness, violent discord and bitterness.

"Boom" (*Wodwo*, p. 23) reveals how even affluence, the excessive supply and stockpile of consumer goods, leaves man inwardly unhappy and discontented:

And faces at the glutton shop-windows
Gaze into the bottomless well
Of wishes

.....
More More More
Meaning Air Water Life
Cry the mouths

That are filling with burning ashes.

When they are crying for more and more of this or that, they are actually deluded. What they need (difference between what they *say* and what they *mean*) is air, water, life—all in big measures, whereas what they are really getting is a mouth chock-full of fuming ash. This consumerism divorced from the gifts of nature is death. A quotation from Jung, if a little too lengthy, may help to understand the poem better:

The man whose interests are all outside is never satisfied with what is necessary but is perpetually hankering after something more and better which, true to his bias, he always seeks outside himself. He forgets completely that, for all his outward successes, he himself remains the same inwardly, and he therefore laments his poverty if he possesses only one automobile when the majority have two. Obviously the outward lives of men could do with a lot more bettering and beautifying, but these things lose their meaning when the inner man does not keep pace with them. To be satisfied with "necessities" is no doubt an inestimable source of happiness, yet the inner man continues to raise his claim, and this can be satisfied by no outward possessions. And the less this voice is heard in the chase after the brilliant things of this world, the more the inner man becomes the source of inexplicable misfortune and uncomprehended unhappiness in the midst of living conditions whose outcome was expected to be entirely different. The externalization of life turns to incurable suffering, because no one can understand why he should suffer from himself. No one wonders at his insatiability, but regards it as his lawful right, never thinking that the one-sidedness of this psychic diet leads in the end to the gravest disturbances of equilibrium. That is the sickness of the Western man, and he will not rest until he has infected the whole world with his own greedy restlessness.¹²

"Her Husband" (*W*, p.19) is about how a narrow materialist outlook ("the stubborn character of money", "the blood-weight of money") arouses within man a blind will to power, a will to dominate others, and thereby destroys one's capacity for love and the possibilities of a happy relationship. The arrogance not only fails to relate a person to others, it also makes one incapable of looking into one's psyche and becoming aware of one's own mistakes and weaknesses. The husband sings from a distance a cheap popular tune in a gruff voice that only establishes him as a he-man with no concern for the slaving wife.

"Kreutzer Sonata" (*W*, p.154) is about an extreme manifestation of possessive love. It is Hughes's commentary on Lev Tolstoy's story "The Kreutzer Sonata",¹³ the title of which is taken from Beethoven's musical composition [formal title *Sonata in A major for Piano and Violin, Opus 47, (1803)*]. Tolstoy's story relates how the protagonist Pozdnyshev murdered his wife because of her suspected love for a musician named Trukachevsky. Although there was nothing illicit between her and the conductor—she just enjoyed playing piano and violin duet with him—Pozdnyshev murdered her merely because of suspicion. He pretended to be a moralist, a defender of the sanctity of marriage ("A sacrifice,

not a murder./One hundred and fifty pounds/Of excellent devil, for God"), although he himself had lived a life of profligacy and had been a lecher. Like a devil that never looks at his own face, he projected his own bestiality on to Trukachevsky and caused this havoc. Here, too violence springs from man's refusal to understand his own self.

"Lovesong" (C, pp. 88-89) is a variation on the same theme of possessive love which again is the expression of a dissociated, insecure ego-consciousness. The tone here is sinister, the language stark and bare. What would have been passionate love-making ("His smiles..." "Her smiles...") develops into a battle of the sexes, replete with all kinds of overt and covert operations. "Their little cries" of the first verse-paragraph give way to "their deep cries" in the second, "flutter" changing to "crawl" with a vengeance. In the third segment, no holds are barred, and it all ends in "their screams". But in spite of such mutual ferociousness and destructiveness, "love is hard to stop". If the lovers cannot be peaceably united, there has to be a murderous union—a union in which through transposition they attain complete identity. There is little to choose between the two.

This poem has been denounced as taking "a black view of human love."¹⁴ But Hughes shows in "Lovesong" one aspect of human love; the other face is to be seen in "Song" (HR) before and "Bride and groom lie hidden for three days" (CB) after. The three poems read together would give a complete view, each overpowering with its own effect. If "Lovesong" appears to be too shocking with its format of slanging match and crescendo of hyperboles, it has to be understood not as the poet's testament of faith, but as a picture of what man can make of woman and woman of man.

The violence that takes place in the microcosm of individual life is multiplied and magnified several folds on the wider scale of the macrocosm—in the form of devastating wars, oppression and exploitation of man by man. "Karma" (*Wodwo*, pp. 160-61), is a presentation of the panoramic view of civilized man's history of destruction, bloodshed and exploitation. Though Hughes does not present the facts and events in a chronological sequence, the almost hallucinatory images, like movie pictures on a huge screen, make a powerful impact on the readers. This lust for blood is still raging on and seems to be beyond appeasement, for the victims'

singing blood still flows

Through the Atlantic and up the Mississippi

And up the jugular

Smoulderingly

Skywriting across the cortex

This whole world, it seems, is a great blood-bath, in which water (ocean and river) is blood, milk is blood and the heart gulps blood without satiation. Thus the history of civilization is a history in which “the mother of the God” has been turned into “the world/Made of Blood”: the earth has become an archive of the evidences of man’s crimes. But these hordes of killers, like their victims, have not survived either. They with their victories have disappeared “under earth’s motherly curve”. They heroically pretend that they have done noble deeds (“They have gone into dumber service. They have gone down / To labour with God on the beaches”), but they lead their existence on a mere animal level, along with the haddock and the flounder. But their alter ego, symbolized by “the poulterer’s hare”, cannot but suffer all the fear and agony and pain. And yet, they would not confront the source of all this suffering. Rather, out of extreme neurotic fear they deny the blame for their past evil karma:

This section of "Karma" strongly reminds one of the sufferings of the deceased, and the judgement scene in the "Sidpa Bardo", which have been graphically described in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. When the officiant tells the deceased individual with evil karma that his suffering comes from his own karma and not from anyone else's, he becomes greatly frightened, trembles and attempts to tell lies, denying having committed any evil deed. Then the Lord of Death will say that he will consult "the Mirror of Karma" and

The image of the mirror in the last line of Hughes's "Karma" may allude to this Mirror of Karma which is held by the Lord of Death during the judgement of the deceased individual and from which nobody can escape.

In "Out", Section I (*Wodwo*, p.155) Hughes describes the agonizing reminiscing moments of a veteran of the First World War who can no more correlate the external world and his memories. While "recovering /From the four-year mastication by gunfire and mud", he experiences a dislocation of sensibility:

His other perforations
Were valiantly healed, but he and the hearth-fire, its blood-flicker
On biscuit-bowl and piano and table-leg,
Moved into strong and stronger possession
Of minute after minute, as the clock's tiny cog
Laboured and on the thread of his listening
Dragged him bodily from under
The mortised four-year strata of dead Englishmen
He belonged with.

Thus though with conscious effort (his "listening" to "the clock's cog") he is trying to extricate himself from his past karma, his inner world ("memory") is still immersed in the battle-scarred past. His four-year-old son also has to relive all his suffering:

Among jawbones and blown-off boots,
tree-stump, shell-cases and craters
Under rain that goes on drumming its rods and thickening
Its kingdom, which the sun has abandoned, and where nobody
Can ever again move from shelter.

With his disintegrated self, the survivor can see only a heap of broken images; and so to him, as to his son, even rain—this rain is a part of the European war front—is not a symbol of nature's regenerating force but is merely an instrument of torture.

But war not only disintegrates the unified self of its survivor and robs him of his free will, war itself is also the manifestation of the fear, hostility and evil in the disintegrated selves, in the nature of those who are in harmony with neither their inner world nor the external world, who cannot recognize their fixations and delusions, and, who out of fear project their own evils on others. Scientific theories based on merely rational and objective attitudes can never make one conscious of one's own projections. The Christian church has also failed to offer protection against the demonic traits within man because its principle of evil, embodied in the Devil, has made man look for the source of evil in the external world rather than in his psyche. ("The Black Beast", *Crow*, p. 28, is a dramatization of this idea). So man has thought it, as Jung says, "a sacred duty to have the biggest guns and the most poisonous gas".¹⁶ In "Crow's Account of the Battle" (*C*, pp. 26-27), we have a view of the modern warfare in its quintessence.

Armed with deadly weapons, fortified with the normal justification from the laws of the objective sciences as well as the scripture ("Reality

was giving its lessons/Its mishmash of scripture and physics"), man has been out to fight not only neighbouring nations supposed to be possessed by a malevolent devil, but also the whole teeming earth with all its plants and animals, a portrait of which has been presented in "Crow's Undersong" (C, p. 56). But Western man, unable to "grasp the true life of the earth, the inner spiritual unity of nature", has been engaged in its mindless devastation. In a hard-hitting review of *The Environmental Revolution* by Max Nicholson, Hughes explains the point:

The fundamental guiding ideas of our Western civilization are against conservation. They derive from reformed Christianity and from Old Testament puritanism. They are based on the assumption that the earth is a heap of raw materials given to man by God for his exclusive profit and use. The creepy crawlies which infest it are devils of dirt and without soul, also put there for his exclusive profit and use. The story of the mind exiled from nature is the story of Western man.

Hughes's paradigm for a man unaware of the "wholeness of this living globe"¹⁷ is the dragon-killing St. George, who "makes us lose energy" by separating "the deepest, and most alien seeming powers in our mind." He disapproves of the story because

It records, in fact, and it sets up as an ideal pattern for any dealing with unpleasant or irrational experience, the complete suppression of the terror. In other words, it is the symbolic story of creating a neurosis, and as it's the key symbolic story of Christianity, it's the key to the neurotic-making dynamics of Christianity. Christianity in suppressing the devil, in fact, suppresses imagination and suppresses vital natural life.¹⁸

In "Crow's Account of St. George" (Crow, pp. 31-32), Hughes presents a modern re-incarnation of St. George, who is a sort of microbiologist, who believes that he can explain all the mysteries of this living globe through his rational-scientific method and present the findings with abstract mathematical symbols, in an abstract computer language:

He sees everything in the Universe
Is a track of numbers racing towards an answer.

.....
With the faintest breath
He melts cephalopods and sorts raw numbers
*Out of their dregs.

But his confidence (hubris) in his rational analytic method receives a severe jolt when he attempts to reduce to numbers the contents of the heart of a living cell which appears to him to be a grinning demon. Though "confused", "shaken", he does not give up his rational method:

He concentrates—
With a knife-edge of numbers
He cuts the heart cleanly in two....
Shaken, he aims his attention—
Finding the core of the heart is a nest of numbers.

But as his repeated attempts fail to reduce the energies of the living cell to abstract numbers and concepts, he becomes more furious as well as terribly afraid. The demon finally appears to him to be "an object four times bigger than the others—/A belly-ball of hair, with crab-legs, eyeless" and a belly like "a horrible oven of fangs". So ultimately with "a sword,/A ceremonial Japanese decapitator", he hacks it, "scatter/The lopped segments..../log-splits/The lolling body, bifurcates it/Top to bottom, kicks away the entrails—/Steps out of the blood-wallow". But what has he achieved, ultimately? Throughout the poem, it is suggested too that the demon corresponds to his unconscious-contents, his denied and suppressed Eros or life-instincts, craving for love, affection, understanding and acceptance. For as he cuts the heart of the "cell" into two, reduces it to an abstract number, he "shivers" (line 15), "his heart begins to pound, his hand trembles" (line 21). It is implied that he does violence to his own self, his own unconscious energies appear to him demonized, and he loses his vital natural life. His self, emptied of the energies of love, becomes terrified and possessed by a will to power. Consequently, he becomes more and more destructive. Indeed, he destroys not only his own vital energies, he finds at the end of his fight with the "demon" that he has killed his wife and children by destroying his capacity for love for other forms of life:

Recovers—

Drops the sword and runs dumb-faced from the house
Where his wife and children lie in their blood.

In "Revenge Fable" (*Crow*, p. 70) Hughes portrays a man who suffers from a split in the self—a part of his self wanting to "get rid of his mother". "Mother" signifies the maternal-feminine principle. But the persona in this poem has turned this principle into a destructive fear which has been explained as mother-complex in depth psychology. Jung explains that a son possessed by the negative aspects of a mother-complex may suffer from self-castration, homosexuality, Don Juanism, madness, etc.¹⁷ Man's priggish guilt-ridden response to sexuality and the association of sexuality with mother produce hatred for mother, for "the mother-love which", as Jung says,

is one of the most moving and unforgettable memories of our lives, the mysterious root of all growth and change; the love that means homecoming, shelter, and the long silence from which everything begins and in which everything ends. Intimately known and yet strange like Nature, lovingly tender and yet cruel like fate, joyous and untiring giver of life.²⁰

In "Revenge Fable" the man in his rage against his mother tries to destroy her and in the process destroys himself:

There was a person
Could not get rid of his mother

As if he were her topmost twig.
 So he pounded and hacked at her
 With numbers and equations and laws
 Which he invented and called truth.
 He investigated, incriminated
 And penalized her, like Tolstoy,
 Forbidding, screaming and condemning,
 Going for her with a knife
 Obliterating her with disgusts
 Bulldozers and detergents
 Requisitions and central heating
 Rifles and whisky and bored sleep
 With all her babes in her arms in ghostly weepings
 She died.

His head fell off like a leaf. (C, p. 70)

However, it must be noted here that Hughes is not merely illustrating a psychopathological concept in abstract medical jargons. His language has the effectiveness and evocative power of everyday speech. The man's attempts to get rid of his mother "with numbers and equations and laws" points to the heartlessness of the mechanisms of the rational-scientific projects. Similarly, his frenzy to obliterate the mother "with disgusts/Bulldozers and detergents/Requisitions and central heating/Rifles and whisky and bored sleep" indicates the civilized man's anxiety-ridden violence-prone life-style. The image of the mother dying "with all her babes in her arms" also suggests the endless abominations of the advanced industrial nations against the teeming earth, as portrayed in "Crow's Undersong" (C, p. 56).

"Revenge Fable" underlines the importance of recognizing the distracting fear and dissipation of vital natural energy due to a misunderstanding of the mother archetype. "Crow and Mama" and "Song for a Phallus" (C, p.17, and pp. 75-77) are also about the same conflict and fear. Sometimes man regards it as a virtue to suppress his feminine traits, the anima. Sometimes man's increasing awareness of mother's femininity in the unconscious makes him incapable of forging a successful love-relationship with a woman and the resulting tensions produce in him restlessness, boredom, destructive death-wish and even hatred for mother. In "Crow and Mama", Crow imitates man's attempt to shout his mother down or to walk away from her, then to escape from her resorting to, first, a car, then a plane, then a rocket. But man's technological exploits or space adventures—Crow "saw the stars millions of miles away/And saw the future and the universe"—only inflict suffering on his mother, on earth, on nature and cannot give him inner peace and happiness. After the rocket's crash on the moon, Crow finds himself crawling out "under his mother's buttocks".

In "Song for a Phallus", too, Hughes presents in traditional ballad metre his version of the Oedipus legend to highlight modern man's fear of the sexual nature of mother:

The Sphinx she waved her legs at him
 And opened wide her maw
 Oedipus stood stiff and wept
 At the dreadful thing he saw
Mamma Mamma (stanza 9)

Oedipus' fear and shame about the creative function of life ("The World is dark", stanza 15) only leads to more and more violence instead of understanding and recognition: he splits the Sphinx with an axe and splits his mother, too. But only the extension of consciousness over the dark inner world and learning to live with the opposites, can dissolve the guilt-ridden illusion. Hughes's version of Oedipus cannot free himself from his schizophrenic violence:

He split his Mammy like a melon
 He was drenched with gore
 He found himself curled up inside
 As if he had never been bore
Mamma Mamma (stanza 16)

In Greek legend, the Sphinx presented this riddle to Oedipus: "which animal has four feet in the morning, two at midday and three in the evening?" Oedipus replied, "Man, who in infancy crawls on all fours, who walks upright in maturity and in old age needs a stick." Oedipus' correct answers to Sphinx's riddles in Greek mythology showed that he recognized himself and the proper functions of each stage of life. But Hughes's Oedipus cried: "The answers aren't in me, /...Maybe your guts have got 'em", and split the Sphinx, releasing "ten thousand ghosts/All in their rotten bodies/Crying, you will never know/what a cruel bastard God is."

Hughes's poetry represents a complex and subtle kind of engagement with the roots and manifestations of violence, tension and contradiction on social as well as individual plane. He did not run away into an esoteric world of myth. On the contrary, his use of myths and symbols raises his explorations to a philosophical level, and the contemporary problems acquire a universal dimension.

CHAPTER SIX

QUARREL WITH LOGOS

"There were two Gods." ("Crow's Theology", C, p. 35)

Hughes's quarrel with puritanical Reformed Christianity has taken varied and complex form in his poetry. However, it is never a gratuitous attack but marked by deep existential anguish. His perception is that puritanical Christianity's hypocritical repression of the instincts, its attempt at going against Nature, has led to a gap between the faith professed and the natural inner urges. Hughes seizes on the contradiction that this variety of Christianity gives rise to: it professes a doctrine of love, goodness, humanity and hope, but it manages to end by producing hatred, depravity, pride and frustration. As a way out, he hints at exploring the pagan roots of Christianity itself, particularly, of the cults of the Mother Goddess that helped archaic man to come to terms with his instinctual energy. His poetry thus gradually takes the shape of a quest for the Great Mother, the embodiment of the creative powers in human nature, which alone is at harmony with the processes of Nature.

Hughes's dissent with the puritanical Christian culture is noticed even in his early poems like "The Conversion of the Reverend Skinner" (*HR*, p. 34) and "Crag Jack's Apostasy" (*L*, p. 55). As the puritanical priest ordains that there is no place for a streetwalker in the church, the rebuffed woman hits back and leaves the place in anger and bitterness. She goes over to the side of the devil forever. The jolt makes the priest realize that profession has rather little to do with innate fibre and that his pride—his practice of mortification of the flesh—"has been the rotten heart of the matter". So he undertakes a life of penitence and develops a reverence for the mystery of sex, of the procreative power in man and in nature. Finally, he experiences conversion: "he rose wild / And sought and blest only what was defiled"; However, his change does not appear to be very convincing. Lack of any powerful metaphor, forced images ("dark heaven" for benighted state of mind), abrupt changes, and absence of inner conflict and suffering, make the poem wooden.

In "Crag Jack's Apostasy", the speaker has been able to overcome only partly the repressive fear instilled in him during childhood by the "dark churches". He is aware of the stirrings of some unknown entity in his "sleeping body". But he does not care whether these forces are

approved or not by the church, he only wishes to be in tune with that being:

I do not desire to change my ways,
 But now call continually
 On you, god or not god, who
 Come to my sleeping body through
 The world under the world; pray
 That I may see more than your eyes
 In an animal's dreamed head; that I shall—

 Keep more than the memory
 Of a wolf's head, of eagle's feet. (L. p. 55)

The poem's strategy, it will be seen, is to undermine the sanctity of the church by the employment of dismissive phrases and attribution of cheerless associations to it. Crag Jack abjures the God that has filled his "world under the world" with dark shadows. But he feels the need to worship a different God—he prays that he may see more than the (red) eyes of his God, that he may fall back upon pleasant memories ("wolf's hand" and "eagle's feet" stand for the terrible forces that control life).

Hughes's criticism against Christian culture and ethics has so far been of a very general kind. It is in *Wodwo* that Hughes puts specific Biblical characters, concepts and symbols to a severe test. Two poems open with a challenge to the Biblical mythology:

No, the serpent was not
 One of God's ordinary creatures.
 Where did he creep from,
 This legless land-swimmer with a purpose? ("Reveille", *W*, p. 35)

No, the serpent did not
 Seduce Eve to the apple.
 All that's simply
 Corruption of the facts. ("Theology", *W*, p. 149)

Hughes then goes on to give his own interpretation of the symbolic significance of the serpent. In the Biblical mythology the serpent has been presented as the embodiment of evil, the cunning Tempter of Eve. It was the snake that tricked Eve to eat the forbidden fruit and by this act, she brought pain, misery and death in human life. But Hughes brushes aside this Genesis story. In "Reveille", the serpent symbolizes the source of awareness of sexuality. In the Garden of Eden Adam and Eve were leading a kind of fruitless life: "Each the everlasting/Holy One of the other". But the "sudden, cruel bite" of the serpent made them awake from their dreamlike existence "with cries of pain". This led to the perpetuation of the human race. So the snake also stands for the generating principle—a positive function. Sex is a great unifier, and leads to wholeness. When a man is united with his wife, as the Bible

says, "they become one" (Genesis 2:24). So how can the snake be regarded as an incarnation of the Devil? God does not disapprove of the reproductive act in the biosphere: "He blessed them all and told the creatures that live in the water to reproduce, and to fill the sea, and he told the birds to increase in number" (Genesis 1:22). And God's command to human beings was no different: "Have many children, so that your descendants will live all over the earth and bring it under their control" (Genesis 1:27-28).

Similarly, Hughes suggests in his poem, the "legless landswimmer" has also "a purpose": it is the purpose of procreation, of bringing about wholeness, removing the false division 'of body and soul, of sexuality and spirituality. If the serpent creates the awareness of sexuality in man and woman, he is actualizing God's wishes. Therefore, sexuality should not be associated with indecency, uncleanness or evil; it manifests the generative force in nature. When in "Theology" (W, p. 149) we find the serpent, "Smiling to hear/God's querulous calling", God appears to be not just prudish but a schizophrenic, a dualist with the illusion of a pure spirit and an evil body. The serpent is not a victim of such a split; like a trickster, he "ate Eve", which may be taken to mean that he instilled the creative urge within Eve, apparently through a trick. Then Eve imbued ("ate") Adam with that same urge. Therefore, "Adam ate the apple": it may be regarded as a figurative presentation of his committing the sex-act.

The snake thus becomes an agent of opening up a process of healing and attaining wholeness. He destroys the illusory innocence of Eden and paves the way for true innocence,—the shedding of the false sense of guilt through a mature understanding of the validity of sex. The effect of the serpent's fructifying and healing power reaches out "beyond Eden... /Over the ashes of the future" ("Reveille"). In future, "The black, thickening river of his body" would reappear to man and woman as a phoenix and, rising out of the ashes, would show them the way to achieve the integrated self. The relevance of this idea to man's day-to-day life in modern society becomes clear from Helen Gardner's testimony during the *Lady Chatterley's Lover* trial:

I think he [D.H. Lawrence] thought the most fundamental thing that was wrong in the modern society was the relation between men and women, what we call sex, and therefore that becomes the heart of his book. To display this subject fully, and as truthfully as he can, in order to suggest that through a better relation between men and women the whole of society may be revived, and cease to be so dead and so full of nothing as he continually suggests in the book it is.¹

Hughes's purpose would appear to be not only to show the reality of sex, to free sex of its stigma, but also to show its role in bringing about in man an awareness of selfhood.

The theme is again taken up in "Gog" (*W*, pp. 150-53). Sagar points out that "Gog" began by being about the basic psychology of Fascism² and Hughes says, "It ended by being about the dragon in Revelations"³.

The reference is to Revelation 12, where a red dragon stands before the woman "whose dress was the sun and who had the moon under her feet", pregnant and screaming in pain of her labour. As the woman was about to give birth to her child, the dragon waited in readiness to eat the baby as soon as it was born. She gave birth to a boy who has to rule all nations with a heavy hand, and he was caught up to God and to his throne. The woman fled into the wilderness, where God had arranged for her protection for three and a half years. The angels fought and defeated the dragon—the ancient serpent called the Devil, or Satan, the one deceiving the whole world—and threw him down onto the earth. The dragon then pursued the woman, but she was taken care of and protected by God. The dragon blew out a great gush of flood to sweep away the woman but the earth swallowed up the flood, and the dragon stood waiting on an ocean beach. Out of the ocean came a strange creature to which the dragon gave all his power and authority to preach blasphemy all over the world and overcome all nations. Out of the earth came another strange animal that deceived people by performing miracles. This was the false prophet. In Revelation 20 Gog is a cohort of Satan in his onslaught on God's men. It may be surmised that Gog of Revelation 20 is the creature of Revelation 13, that looked like a leopard but had bear's feet and a lion's mouth.

But Hughes's Gog must be different from the Biblical Gog—not even is he the dragon. In the Revelation the dragon's mouth was open, not in adoration, but in a threat to devour. He did not run away at God's shout about Alpha and Omega (which was really heard by John the Baptist who writes the entire epistle on The Revelation), he was thrown down in defeat. He was not able to devour the child, so "motherly weeping" cannot be on account of loss of the child. In the Revelation, the woman (mother) is protected by God against all the persecutions of the dragon and the woman and the dragon could not have been on one side against God. The horsemen of the Apocalypse go out into the world to punish the enemies of God and not the woman. Hughes's "Gog" therefore seems to be a reworking of the Biblical myth for stating his own theme. The Biblical echoes heard in the names and phrases or even characters should not be taken exactly in the senses or contexts in which they appear in the Bible.

Hughes's remark in *The Poet Speaks* only proves that the image of the dragon waiting to eat the child of the pregnant woman was strongly printed on his mind. The remains of this image are to be seen in "Hearing the Messiah cry/My mouth widens" (although the dragon

would not have perceived the child as Messiah), and in "motherly weeping" (the painful cry of the woman in labour). But Hughes's Gog, who runs in fear and notices "an absence bounding by his side", who adores the Messiah, who asks (sheepishly perhaps) "What was my error?", who does not look at the rocks and trees because he is frightened of what they see (presumably the Alpha and the Omega), who drinks quietly at a pool and spends a very restless night, is not the aggressive obscene creature of the Bible. The only idea that linked the original image to Hughes's picture is that of "the urge to eat". Hughes's Gog is therefore an embodiment of unfulfilled hunger, a natural urge in all creatures. He is obsessed by his abstinence and deprivation ("an absence bounded beside me"). All other creatures may eat to live, not he. While all the living and the non-living (dog, mouse, lichen, air, dust) have their fill, he has nothing (first 3 stanzas). He asks but fails to understand what his fault was. He loses his peace, his voice is throttled and his teeth (instruments of eating) chatter. As he stamps around in his massive frame (suggesting the magnitude of the urge), all tender sad sounds are drowned. He finally lays himself down for a rest and the rocks and trees—his antennas of sensations (used three times as a motif)—fade out in the darkness. He becomes one with darkness but has no peace—his ears sing, his head swings and his feet stamp on.

The linking of John the Baptist's experience with Gog's feelings leads to a hypothesis that Gog is the representation of man's sorry state brought about by the denial of his bodily urges under the injunction of the omnipotent terrible God.

Section II (1967) which followed Section III in chronology¹, must have come as an afterthought, but must have been inserted as a necessary bridge between Sections I and III. This section presents a picture of absolute sterility and lifelessness. The sun and the moon, remains of the Revelation image (the woman was clothed with the sun and the moon was beneath the feet) are all exploded and dead. Life is only seasonal ("mere rainfall rivulets"), "everywhere the dust is in power". The question that Gog now asks is: what are the intimations ("eyes") and displays ("Dance of Wants,/Of offering") for? These intimations and displays are noticed in the sun and the moon, grass and stones, the prolific grass blossoms ("their quick people"), the spattering of colour all around. The feminine principle (the creative spirit) is mirrored in all these things—all these now enveloped in death.

In Section III, new life appears in the form of the Holy Warrior, a horseman in an iron visor, coming out of the dark ("wound-gash in the earth", "blood-dark womb", "between granite jambs", "through the dark archway of earth") like a germinating sapling ("shaking his plumes clear of dark soil"). This is the irresistible life force which Hughes has

noticed in "Thistles" and "Still Life" (*W*, p. 17 and p. 18). He is a sentinel in heavy armour, which keeps him in a shell, gifted with love and light ("seraph"). But as he searches for the erotic zones, with his limited vision ("slits of iron"), pat come the four injunctions that he must be kept away from the snares of the flesh. All the dreams that are nourished by the creative principle, the feminine principle, are to be suppressed. He must be brought up and kept under an iron discipline. He must resist all sentiments, use his weapon ruthlessly against opposition and appeal alike—in order to attain "the light". This iron knight therefore rides roughshod over the female sex symbols ("vaginas of iron" and "the wombs ... of stone"), killing the serpent-like female sexuality ("fanged grail") which sucks up the male like a "tireless mouth", which tempts and undermines him till death.

The final hypothesis is that the hooded knight and Gog are one and the same, the symbol of Christian man commanded and condemned to self-denial and self-oppression by his own God. The first and third sections are composed in a dramatic mode charged with irony.

In "Logos" (*W*, p. 34) Hughes presents the dichotomy between body and spirit with the help of imagery that is cosmic in nature. He suggests that the force which brings forth life subsequently absorbs it again. Destruction is only a pre-requisite to life's renewal. Our body is subject to change, decay and death, but the spirit is said to be eternal, changeless, and immanent. Such a dualistic scheme can only increase our fear of death. We can grasp the paradox that creation and destruction are parts of a larger pattern only if we understand the processes to be continuous and complimentary. The total human experience can then be seen as part of the cosmic phenomenon.

Such realization could be presented in poetry only through myth—not through cold abstractions. The ritual enactment of the primitive seasonal vegetation-god dying and being received by a Mother Goddess only to be revived and reborn could help us to grasp the significance of human life through myth. In the second segment of "Logos", Hughes presents his own version of the elements of such a myth and then juxtaposes it with the concept of Logos, which has replaced the primitive myth with the dogma of an omnipotent, rational, hegemonistic, self-sufficient God.

The word "logos" has rich associations³ and its history is relevant in understanding Hughes's poem. Stoicism developed the concept of logos to mean "the principle and matter that gave 'the world or cosmos its character and coherence'". Later, in the Greek translations of the Old Testament, "logos" was used to render the Hebrew word, "dabar" which could mean "word", "thing" or "event". In English it was translated as "word", which was used for God's own speech. Philo, the theologian

of Judaism in Alexandria, took over the word "logos" from Greek cosmology in order to reconcile the Biblical account of the creation of the world with the account of cosmology in ancient Greek philosophy. Later, it was thought that "wisdom" (Greek "sophia") had a mediatorial role between God and creation, and gradually the idea became associated with the concept of logos. Thus, God's logos became "a clearly identifiable entity", "a subordinate being" "mediating between God and the world, the mode of divine creativity and revelation". Later still, in the New Testament written in Greek, Jesus is described as preaching the logos of God, and finally in the Johannine literature Jesus himself is identified as "logos" (John 1: 1-3, 14; Revelation 19: 13). In other New Testament books also, without the use of the term "logos", Jesus has been described as the mediator in creation:

For through him God created everything in heaven and on earth, the seen and the unseen things... (Colossians 1: 16)

He (the Son) is the one through whom God created the universe. ... He reflects the brightness of God's glory and is the exact likeness of God's own being, sustaining the universe with his powerful word.

(Hebrews 1: 2-3)

Hughes's opening lines in "Logos" (*W*, p. 34)

God gives the blinding pentagram of His power
For the frail mantle of a person
To be moulded onto

seem to allude to these passages in the New Testament. And the later lines

So if they come
This unlikely far, and against such odds —
the perfect strength is God's

also echo the Biblical thoughts that in spite of the Original Sin and the many sins after that committed by man he is saved only through God's grace:

God's grace is much greater, and so is his free gift to so many people through the grace of one man, Jesus Christ. (Romans 5:15)

For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Hughes's language in "Logos" closely parallels the language of these Biblical passages. If man expects to achieve eternal life through procreation, his expectation can be fulfilled only if God permits—it is more likely to be a "doomed did". For how can man get rid of his human nature? The apostle Paul warns:

To be controlled by human nature results in death; to be controlled by the Spirit results in life and peace. And so a person becomes an enemy

of God when he is controlled by his human nature; for he does not obey God's law, and in fact he cannot obey it. Those who obey their human nature cannot please God. (Romans 8: 6-8)

But man's predicament is that he is doomed with a "sinful" nature, he is bedevilled. Who then created the Devil? God could not have permitted the originator of sin to have sway over His own creation. Was there then another creator, prior to God?

In the following part of "Logos", Hughes presents a creation myth, taking us beyond existing mental constructs of all kinds to a state akin to archetypal chaos. He imagines a primordial situation "Creation", convulsing in nightmare or labour. God himself was delivered out of this turmoil, which "spits it kicking out, with a swinish cry—which is God's first cry". Hughes's image of the sea is equated with this primeval "Creation". The sea pulls everything to pieces. The mumbled repetition of the ancient laws is drowned in the noise among the shingles and shells, all words and meanings becoming disjointed ("phrasings" and "truths", "falling to pieces"). This is how the great surge of creation makes short work of God's logos. It was a well-meant invention of God's ("God is a good fellow") but His mother (Creation) will not allow it. God, who recognises only a partial reality, is afraid of the idea of the destructive-creative nature of the sea/Creation. God tried to impose his own law arbitrarily, without reconciling it with the "ancient law" of Creation, His mother; but because of its partial nature, the well-intentioned law of God is always in conflict with the law of Creation: "God is a good fellow, but His mother's against Him". According to the doctrine of the Original Sin, even a new-born baby is a sinner. So it "is lamenting/ That it ever lived". However, the doctrine of the Original Sin may account for the origin of evil only inadequately, and ultimately runs out of argument. For this doctrine

derived from a Christian interpretation of the Adamic myth in Genesis 1-3 ... places the blame for Adam's sin on Adam Himself, thus exonerating God from any responsibility of evil But the Adamic myth seems to imply 'an evil before evil'; a sort of un verbalized evil. For Adam's sin would appear to be not absolutely the first, a fact that seems to be symbolized by the role of the serpent."

In Hughes's new mythology God appears to be a narrow, despotic being; a dogmatist puritan Adonis not responding to the call of Venus; one who fails to resolve the contradiction in the universe between light and darkness, good and evil, spirit and body, and merely tries to suppress one of the pairs instead of reconciling the two. Indeed, God, or His logos, imagined to be pure good and light, only accentuates the dichotomy. As the apostle Paul writes:

So I find that this law is at work : when I want to do what is good, what is evil is the only choice I have. My inner being delights in the

law of God. But I see a different law at work in my body—a law that fights against the law which my mind approves of. It makes me a prisoner to the law of sin which is at work in my body. What an unhappy man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is taking me to death? Thanks be to God, who does this through our Lord Jesus Christ! This, then is my condition: on my own I can serve God's law with my mind, while my human nature serves the law of sin.

(Romans 7: 21-25)

Such internal discord and suffering, Hughes's poem implies, is the inescapable consequence of the inadequacy of the Christian version of the concept of logos. Here Hughes's miniature myth actually embodies a particular theory of evil. Ekbert Faas in an essay "Confronting the Horrific" notes that in most non-Western religions and cultures the horrific, destructive aspect of Nature is regarded as an intrinsic part of the divine. In support of his argument he mentions the Indian Mother Goddess, the devouring Black Kali, and the Mexican Earth Mother, mother of all the Aztec divinities Coatlicue, both of whom are adorned with the blood-dripping hands, heads or hearts of their victims. The Hindu God Vishnu in his "Universal Form" as "Time", "the Destroyer of the Worlds", is also represented as equipped with many faces, eyes, arms, bellies, legs, terrible teeth and devouring mouths. These non-Western religions have accepted the belief that evil is an unalterable part of the divine. Employing Jungian hypothesis, Faas concludes that by offering obeisance to such images of the horrific, the non-Western peoples could purge the irrational, destructive drives hidden in their collective unconscious. But Western culture, argues Faas, has excluded "such notions from the accepted part of its religious consciousness". Greek idealistic philosophy and Judaeo-Christian eschatological thinking have reinforced each other in "the illusion that good may exist without evil". Christianity explained evil as "the result man's sinfulness",⁷ or as the machinations of the Devil. So the figure of the Great Mother uniting the benevolent and monstrous aspects of her different hypostases was abused as the great whore of Babylon in league with the Devil. The consequences of this suppression of the Mother Goddess (or the female principle) are now being witnessed everywhere in the outbreak of neurotic self-torment, both psychic and physical violence, depravity and destructiveness.

Crow carries on this theme of the conflict of the divided self of man, and the role of Christianity in bringing about this dissension, in a direct and belligerent manner. Hughes looks at this conflict as "the biological polarity of the life of the body and archaic nervous system and the life of the reflective cortex".⁸ He presents *Crow* as a quester unburdened with any mental or moral constructs of human civilization, as one "separated from everything—just a creature with no attribute whatsoever

except the will to keep searching".⁹ In *Crow*, Hughes adopted the strategy which, he thought, Shakespeare, too, had adopted in order to confront the conflict between "the old Goddess—the real deity of Medieval England, the Celtic pre-Christian Goddess" and the forces of rising Puritanism. Shakespeare created "a provisional *persona*, an emergency self to deal with the crisis", a *persona* who would somehow hang on to all the fragments as the newly throned god and the deposed goddess tore each other to pieces behind his face. And this is where Shakespeare's hero comes staggering in. Mother-wet, weak-legged, horrified at the task, boggling Hamlet".¹⁰

Crow, Hughes's hero, too, functions as "an emergency self" or a "provisional *persona*" for him. Crow has a multiple function: sometimes he is an observer and narrator of the human situation; at times he is an impudent interloper; at other times, he is a victim of circumstances. He is incorrigibly meddlesome. His adventures, experiments and ordeals portray the different aspects and stages of his search for his Creator: "Crow's whole quest aims to locate and release his own creator",¹¹ but it also incorporates the search for an understanding of his own self, for his own nature, for "in searching for who'd created him he had to first of all find himself and then he would have found who'd created him".¹²

A full, sustained understanding of himself eludes Crow; but he often has fleeting glimpses of such knowledge, as in "Crow's First Lesson", "Crow Tyrannosaurus" and "Crow's Nerve Fails". In the first poem, God tries to teach Crow the doctrine of love. This "love" is merely an "abstract good", not the generative force of nature, a concept that distances itself from the physical and regards it as evil. But such an abstract dualistic scheme goes against Crow's grain. The suppressed instinctual life turns into "cannibal murderous with deprivation", to use Hughes's own phrase¹³. So God's attempt to tutor Crow in the idea of love that suppresses and denies the physical, only stirs up and releases evil in the explosive appearance of the denied demands of the body. The text demands to be fully quoted:

God tried to teach Crow how to talk.

"Love", said God. "Say, Love".

Crow gaped, and the white shark crashed into the sea

And went rolling downwards, discovering its own depth.

"No, no", said God, "Say Love. Now try it. LOVE."

Crow gaped, and a bluefly, a tsetse, a mosquito

Zoomed out and down

To their sundry flesh-pots.

"A final try", said God. "Now, LOVE".

Crow convulsed, gaped, retched and

Man's bodiless prodigious head

Bulbed out onto the earth, with swivelling eyes,
Jabbering protest—

And Crow retched again, before God could stop him.
And woman's vulva dropped over man's neck and tightened.
The two struggled together on the grass.
God struggled to part them, cursed, wept —

Crow flew guiltily off. (C, p. 20)

"Bulb out" not only describes the emergence of the truncated head in a vivid and realistic way, it also suggests the idea of the seed, the prototype, of multiplication and proliferation (plant bulb) and a picture of male genitalia. The final image, shocking as it is in its obscenity, is yet irrefutable and ultimately satisfying.

God's bitter and helpless curses are directed as much to His creation as, perhaps, to Himself. But God's puritanical tantrums make Crow's releasing the energy of "love, the creative force of nature,"¹⁴ appear to him as an act of indecency and shame, and he feels "guilty". Denial and suppression of physical love in favour of an abstract concept of pure love only transforms it into a destructive force. Hughes's observation in his essay on Shakespeare is relevant here:

When the physical presence of love has been degraded to lust, and forbidden lust has combined with every other forbidden thing to become a murderous devil, life itself has become a horror, the maiden has become a whore and a witch, and miraculous source of creation has become the empty hole through into Nothing.¹⁵

The poem with its form of fable, simplicity of language and ascending order of shock, brings home the point very forcefully.

"Crow Tyrannosaurus" reveals another aspect of the dichotomy of the body and spirit. Crow fearfully discovers that sheer physical survival for one form of life in the animal kingdom involves destruction of other forms. Creation appears to him to be "a cortege/Of mourning and lament". He notes that the pulsating of the swift's body depends on the "anguish" of the insects it has killed. Similarly, the well-being of the body of the cat or of the dog is the result of the deaths of living organisms either of them has "gulped for the flesh and bones". Even man, as a denizen of the animal world, as Crow could see it, is "a walking/Abattoir /Of innocents—/His brain incinerating their outcry". Now, Crow feels embarrassed for his inability to abjure destruction of life for bodily survival and his incapacity for being true spiritual substance:

Crow thought, "Alas
Alas ought I
To stop eating
And try to become the light?" (C, p. 24)

This guilt-ridden response of a self divided between abstract good (light)

and physical evil (eating) may sound rather innocent, but Crow's nature is too hard-grained to be soaked by moral considerations. His instinctive reflex actions make the ultimate "he" the resultant in a parallelogram of forces: more vulnerable, or rather true, to his animal self:

But his eye saw a grub.
And his head, trappung, stabbed
And he listened
And he heard
Weeping
Grubs grubs. He stabbed. He stabbed
Weeping
Weeping

Weeping he walked and stabbed. (C, pp. 24-25)

The counterpoint between "weeping" and "stabbed" frees Crow's response to the urge for survival from any touch of cynicism. He is deeply aware of the agonies he is causing to others. But he knows that existence entails suffering, both his own and of others. Thus, Crow may remind us of the tyrannosaurus, the pre-historic carnivorous reptile, but he is sapient enough to register the finer sensibilities of existence.

In "Crow's Nerve Fails", Crow feels almost unsettled by the riddle of existence: its creative-destructive nature:

Crow, feeling his brain slip,
Finds his every feather the fossil of a murder.

Who murdered all these?
These living dead, that root in his nerves and his blood
Till he is visibly black? (C., p. 47)

The oxymoron, "these living dead" expresses the basic paradox of life: that life and death are one, that every dead body is a reminder of the life it once had, and in every living body we are conscious of the dead that sustain it. Even as life brings about death and feeds on death, death also is engaged in the creation of life. It would remind one of Heraclitus who believed that "everything, like flame in fire, is born by the death of something else".¹⁶ Hughes himself alluded to Heraclitus' saying, "Mortals are immortal, and immortals are mortals, the one living the other's death and dying the other's life",¹⁷ in his poem "Ghost Crabs": "They are the powers of this world./We are their bacteria,/Dying their lives and living their deaths" (*W*, p. 22). But such philosophizing may appear to be rather superfluous to Crow who prefers a down-to-earth, unsentimental attitude to the facts of existence. At the same time Crow has no philistine impatience for the deeper mysteries of existence. The rest of the poem reveals a humility that is informed with a sense of awe, and submission to the processes of life, and a realization that survival is dependent on others:

How can he fly from his feathers?
And why have they homed on him?
Is he the archive of their accusations?
Or their ghostly purpose, their pining vengeance?
Or their unforgiven prisoner?

He cannot be forgiven.

His prison is the earth. Clothed in his conviction,
Trying to remember his crimes

Heavily he flies. (C, p. 47)

The rhetoric of "archive of their accusations", "their pining vengeance", "his conviction", etc. would have sounded pompous and phoney but for this awareness of humility and acknowledgement of gratitude. The question of forgiveness, raised and repeated, along with the last line, precludes any flippancy and reinforces the sense of responsibility, humility and compassion that must characterize one's attitude to the facts and mysteries of existence.

Another group of Crow poems, consisting chiefly of "A Horrible Religious Error", "Apple Tragedy", "A Childish Prank" and "Crow Blacker than Ever", takes us back to the beginning of creation only to make us take a fresh look at the events there. The serio-comic, blasphemous manner acts as an antidote to Christian dogmatism. It makes one feel that "Christianity is just another provisional myth of man's relationship with the creator and the world of spirit"¹⁸, and opens up possibilities for the development of a new attitude to the actual human condition. The thematic implications of these poems make it clear that they are not remote from the problems of the present-day world. Rather, one becomes aware that in this world ruled by the chain of causation, the subject of creation is a moot point—not only highly relevant, but almost inescapable in the understanding of self and society. Not that Hughes's versions provide us with the eternal truths, or permanent solutions to these problems; but they make us go through the "exercise of historical and psychological imagination".¹⁹ Besides, though Hughes talks in terms of the Biblical mythology, his treatment of his sources touches not only those brought up within the Biblical tradition, but all who have had a sense of disintegration under the impact of a dualistic conception of life, all who are confronted with an outlook that recognizes nothing beyond the external world.

Christianity, for Hughes, is not only "provisional", but also inadequate as a myth of man's relationship with the creator and the world of spirit. So he revises and edits the myth by giving the old ingredients new dimensions and functions so that an adequate substantive explanation could be provided in which the contradictions are reconciled. He

parodies the Christian attitude to the origin and function of sexuality in human life. In Genesis 1: 27, God asks man and woman to multiply themselves, but Christ seems to repudiate marriage (Matthew 19: 12). And in 1 Corinthians 7, the apostle Paul accepts marriage merely "as a concession" (1 Corinthians 7: 6). He explicitly states: "So the man who marries does well, but the one who doesn't marry does even better" (1 Corinthians 7: 38). Paul concedes the idea of marriage as merely a check to "Satan's temptation" (1 Corinthians 7: 5), to the drift towards "immorality" (1 Corinthians 7: 2). As he says:

A man does well not to marry. But because there is so much immorality, every man should have his wife, and every woman should have her own husband. (1 Corinthians 7:1-2)

Now, to the unmarried and to the widows I say that it would be better for you to continue to live alone, as I do. But if you cannot restrain your desire, go ahead and marry; it is better to marry than to burn with passion. (1 Corinthians 7: 8-9)

Sex is immoral, but the immorality may be contained, its rampancy checked, only by allowing limited sex through marriage. Paul's attitude to marriage is thus singularly negative, to be resorted to only as a mode of restraint; it is better if one can repress the sexual instinct completely. How would God's exhortations to man and woman in Genesis 1: 27, be obeyed if Paul's advice is followed? In "A Childish Prank" (C, p. 19), God runs out of ideas, and dozes off in intellectual exhaustion:

Man's and woman's bodies lay without souls,
Dully gaping, foolishly staring, inert,
On the flowers of Eden.
God pondered.
The problem was so great, it dragged him asleep.

To the devout, the question is intriguing: what did God ponder over? What exactly was his "problem"? There is a subtle hint that he was thinking about how man's and woman's bodies could be activated without being troubled with physical desires and functions. At this moment, intervenes Crow, the trickster:

Crow laughed.
He bit the Worm, God's only son,
Into two writhing halves.

It is to be noted how subversive poetry can be: God may abhor the idea of sexuality, but he sets the example and provides the cause. "The Worm, God's only son", (a variation on "the Word", the usual expression for Christ as Logos in the New Testament, John 1: 14, 16, for instance) provides that cause and seed. Crow's act of bisecting "the Worm" is instinctive but apt—stuffing the tailhalf into man with the wounded end hanging out and the headhalf into woman headfirst, only creates the urge for union, for separated, "(O) it was painful." This description equates,

at one stroke, the devil (the Worm or serpent) and God's own son (the Word) and ensures the succession of this seed in man through copulation. In the last analysis, the New Testament God who could not reconcile the urges of the body with those of the soul sowed the seed for this division within man; and it is He who unwittingly provides the seed for the union. Crow, by bringing to an end the dull, inert, sterile existence of man and woman "on the flowers of Eden", solves God's problem for Him and man and woman's problem for them, without anybody being wiser about what really happens. His act therefore is a prank, innocent and humorous, and pregnant with great possibilities.

"Apple Tragedy" (C, p.78) explores aspects of man's confused confrontation with the potentialities and pitfalls of sexuality. The concluding lines of the poem present the symbolic contours of a modern human situation of sexual jealousy:

Now whenever the snake appears she screeches
Here it comes again! "Help! Help!"
Then Adam smashes a chair on its head.
And God says: "I am well pleased"

And everything goes to hell.

God's moral teaching has made a veritable hell of human life. Ironically, God seems to be "pleased" because man and woman have come to fear sexuality (the snake) which is the source of creation, although it was He who had intoxicated them all with cider and driven them to sexual passion. Eve is the active force and prefers the cockeyed serpent to the frigid Adam, and gives him a wild time. But faced with the rage of the stolid Adam, who was made envious by God when He found the situation going out of His hand, Eve works up a stance of moral outrage. Adam's alienated, repressed rage explodes into mindless violence. Eve acts the outraged modest wife; poor serpent, who was spurred on by both God and Eve, gets a bad bashing:

Eve drank and opened her legs
And called to the cockeyed serpent
And gave him a wild time.
God ran and told Adam
Who in drunken rage tried to hang himself in the orchard.

The serpent tried to explain, crying "Stop"
But drink was splitting his syllable
And Eve started screeching: "Rape! Rape!"
And stamping on his head. (C, p.78)

God is the villain of the piece in this tragedy. He is the interloper who plays mischief and sows seeds of dissension among the inmates. He is more dangerous than Devil in the original story, for he is not only able to set man against his own creator, he is also able to corrupt the creator

(serpent) himself. Everything goes to hell as a result of his "new game", and he has reason to be "well pleased"—he has chalked up a perfect score. There is no hero in this tragedy—Adam is brainless, Eve is a prude and a hypocrite, and the Creator is befuddled and comically reduced. The well-meaning creator tried a reconciliation and explanation, but all that he could do in his stupor was to split his syllable in "Stop!" It would not be far-fetched to imagine that Hughes intended this to be heard as "sss-top!"—The hissing sound being the serpent's signature tune and the exclamation "top!" sounding like a wonderful piece of comic irony, giving Eve more ground for a cry of outrage.

But the scope and implications of the poem are not limited to the problem of self-awareness or the lack of it; the question is related to broader socio-cultural issues, such as the status of woman as personal property and the institution of monogamous sexual relationship. The poem revises the Biblical creation myth by presenting the real God as a mere "interloper" who sowed the seeds of division, conflict and strife in the psyche of Adam and Eve. The existing moral ideas about the nature of sex are thus stood on their heads and scrutinized. There is an element of Jungian thought in Hughes:

A direct and spontaneous expression of sexuality is a natural occurrence and, as such, never ugly or repulsive. It is "moral" repression that makes sexuality on the one hand dirty and hypocritical, and on the other shameless and blatant.²⁰

As the high-mindedness of the original myth gives way to pity and humour here, a question may naturally arise whether Hughes is championing sexual promiscuity. The poem is not really a plea for sexual indulgence. It reveals the sordid havoc that has been caused to our psychic life by our possessiveness and priggishness.

"Crow Blacker then ever" (C, p. 69) too, explores modern man's inner disharmony:

Then heaven and earth creaked at the joint
Which became gangrenous and stank—
A horror beyond redemption.

The opening lines of the poem presents the tragic phenomenon of a rift between the two worlds for which, it is implied, God is responsible. This is like a gaping wound, later to turn putrid and lethal, vitiating the whole life of man. It was about to reach an irreversible stage, when

Crow nailed them together,
Nailing Heaven and earth together—

The opening situation parodies the anger of the biblical God at the sinful people of Israel that we find in many books of the Old Testament, such as Ezekiel, Hosea, Amos and so on. But man's nature, too, has rebelled again and again against a system that represses his instincts without

understanding and accommodating them. "And Man/Turned towards Eve" connotes opposition to a puritanical-repressive attitude to the sexual energy. Such an escapist-negative attitude cannot but be unsatisfactory and destructive; it cannot liberate the instincts, release the energies of the body and lead to integration and self-fulfilment. At this point enters Crow with his rough-and-tumble solution that turns out to be a parody of the idea of Incarnation. It worked, but in an altogether new way:

So man cried, but with God's voice.
And God bled, but with man's blood.

.....
The agony did not diminish.
Man could not be man nor God God.

The agony

Grew.

Crow

Grinned

Crying: 'This is my Creation',

Flying the black flag of himself. (C, p. 69)

Crow's attempt at the healing act is inadequate because it is mechanical and not organic—it is crude carpentry in place of delicate surgery and systemic assimilation. God was disgusted with man on account of his earthiness, and man was fed up with God because He was too demanding, and there was a dissociation between man's physical needs and spiritual needs. The gap was like a lethal festering sore and there seemed to be no way of mending the situation. Crow, the uninhibited, uninvolved trouble-shooter, attempted a patch-up by nailing heaven and earth together. This application of force suggests that the healing was not smooth or automatic, the suture was painful and noticeable, but it achieved some kind of unification—man could cry in spiritual agony and God had to relent. It is through pain and sacrifice that the spirit and body are united,—even if separated. It is a precarious union and a macabre comedy.

Man must accept himself in the totality of all his experiences to be at peace with himself, define himself in terms of his wholeness and not as part man, part God. A consciousness that the only way to redemption is spiritual and not to be engrossed in "sinful" physical desires, can only make man suffer from the agony of alienation. The suppression of physical desires is no solution nor is complete indulgence, abandoning a spiritual quest.

Thus Crow's hamstrung solution, his grinning boastful crying "This is my Creation" with a capital "C" and "flying the black flag of himself" only makes him "Blacker than ever". The ending clearly shows that Hughes is not attacking the Christian morality from an extremist

position. All that he wants to say is that half-measures are of no use; balanced judgement and action alone can lead to enlightenment.

Crow's search for his creator, (the creative-destructive Nature) is specifically dealt with in a few poems. In "Fragments of an Ancient Tablet", through the above/below dichotomy, the nature of the creative source has been suggested. Crow's treatment of the snake in "A Horrible Religious Error" has been described by Hughes "as one of the episodes in which Crow misunderstands and mismanages an encounter with his creator."²¹

But a glimpse of his creator is presented in "Crow's Undersong". "Undersong" "in the old acceptance of the word" was the burden, or base or foot of a song. "It was sung throughout, and not merely, at the end of a verse.... Many of these burdens were short proverbial expressions... Other burdens were mere nonsense words that went glibly off the tongue, giving the accent of the music, such as hey nonny, nonny, no."²² "Crow's Undersong" is about a female that suggests a portrait of Mother Earth or Nature:

She comes with the birth push

.....

She stays

Even after life even among the bones

She comes dumb she cannot manage words

She brings petals in their nectar fruits in their plush

She brings a cloak of feathers an animal rainbow

She brings her favourite furs and these are her speeches... (C, p. 56)

In "Crow's Theology" (C, p. 35) Crow finds discrepancy in the Christian God's claim to be the Creator of the Universe and realizes that there is another greater Creator ("there were two Gods"), who is this material universe, the Earth or Nature. In fact, he realizes that the Christian God is not the real creator. However, Crow cannot assert this perception in any one of his "Songs"; it has remained only as an "undersong" throughout the book. But the poem's image of the Earth Mother, with its utmost tenderness and subtlety, underscores the significance of love.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE JOURNEY TO HEALING

Gaudete:

"Annunciation Of clay, water and the sunlight". (G, p. 199)

Recognition of the true nature of the maternal feminine principle, which is an essential aspect of Hughes's constant search for the wholeness of the self, is dramatized in *Gaudete*. A long narrative poem, with a Prologue and an Epilogue, it is organized on the model of "the Folktale" (G, p. 9). One of the sources of the narrative is a story of a legendary poet in Scotland who was carried away by the fairies to heal their queen and kept confined for seven years. Hughes added other elements and suggestions to this story¹ to create a myth of transformation of the human soul. The Argument (G, p. 9) gives an indication of the story-line. The 1977 edition of "Gaudete" had a shorter Argument, but the 1979 edition adds some more detail to it, particularly the one that the Epilogue poems are "hymns and psalms to a nameless female deity" (G, p. 9).

In the Prologue to *Gaudete*, the Reverend Nicholas Lumb, while walking through the oppressive twilight of an empty town in the North of England, meets an old man who leads him to a "a firelit, domed, subterranean darkness" (G, p. 13). Lumb finds a "woman tangled in the skins of wolves, on the rock floor" (G, p. 14), but does not recognize her. Nor does he understand why he has been summoned there. But the woman seems to be sick, so Lumb attempts to have a close look at her:

Lumb bends low
Over her face half-animal
And the half-closed animal eyes, clear-dark back to the first creature
And the animal mane
The animal cheekbone and jaw, in the fire's flicker
The animal tendon in the turned throat
The upper lip lifted, dark and clean as a dark flower... (G, p. 14)

But Lumb cannot understand what ails the woman

He declares he can do nothing
He protests there is nothing he can do
For this beautiful woman who seems to be alive and dead.
He is not a doctor. He can only pray. (G, p.15)

The association of animals with the physical features of this woman and

her dark flower-like upper lip calls forth the image of a being embodying the life and sensations of Nature. Lumb is abducted to revitalize her because as an Anglican clergyman, he represents the faith that suppressed and deprived her of her energy. History and prehistory, the real and the imaginative, seem to coalesce here to create a dreamlike state of things. The ancient man who asks Lumb to accompany him, and whose voice is described as a "rough-snagged shillelagh of voice, hard and Irish, courteous, apologetic, almost affectionate" (G, p.13), reminds one of a Druid because of his appearance and because of the association of the oak log and a dying patient. The Druids "offered human victims for those who were gravely sick", and the word "Druid" means "knowing (or finding) the oak Tree." The Druids frequented oak forests and held the doctrine of transmigration of the soul.²

A search was on everywhere for Lumb because he was expected to cure the sickness of the woman in the underworld. As punishment for his failure to cure her, Lumb is to be hanged. He is brought in the clearing of a steep, rocky wood, and then is ordered to choose a tree. He chooses a young oak tree, "a tree of distinction" (G, p. 16). The association of the oak tree and the manner in which Lumb is punished—he is tied to the tree and flogged—has close correspondences with a Druidic rite. The Druid-like spirits want Lumb to know the mystery of the oak tree, and share their secret knowledge. They want Lumb to be reborn a new man with the awareness of the mystery of the woman in the underworld. In the Epilogue when Lumb reappears, he has undergone a transformation and is found composing hymns to a nameless female deity.

But the other Lumb, created out of the oak log through the flogging of the original Lumb tied to the oak tree, is made to perform the ritual of bull sacrifice. He is made to shoot with a pistol on a target-spot on the bull's forehead, but "the shot slams into his brain" (G, p. 18). Almost drowned with blood and buried in guts, he wallows in the guts and blood of the bull, and buckets of fresh blood are flung on him, he is allowed to escape from this gory ritual to come out into the open street of the town. In many primitive cults the sacrifice of the bull, a well-worn symbol of virility, signifies the increase of the powers of fertility. Thus Lumb, wallowing and bathing in the bull's blood, is supposed to be infused with the procreative powers of the bull.

But just as the original Lumb was found to be inadequate because of his excessive spirituality and suppression of the energy of the fertility goddess, the changeling (oak-log) Lumb also proves to be unworthy of his job because of his excessive sexual urge and lack of spirituality. The second epigraph suggests the relation between the two Lumbs by quoting from *Perzival*, Book XV (G, p. 8).

They are to be regarded as the two halves of the self-same person. The self split as the two halves failed to come to terms. In the original Lumb the instinctual needs were subjugated by renunciation, prayer, and the Christian moral ethic. In the changeling Lumb the instincts must have immediate gratification: in the main narrative he goes on to copulate with all the women of his parish. This love ritual is made out to be the precursor of the new Christianity he is going to preach.

Mr Lumb has a new religion.

He is starting Christianity allover again right from the start.

He has persuaded all the women in the parish.

Only women can belong to it.

They are all in it and he makes love to them all, all the time.

Because a saviour

Is to be born in this village, and Mr. Lumb is to be the earthly father.

So all the women, in the village

Must give him a child

Because nobody knows which one the saviour will be. (G. pp. 113-14)

But soon Lumb is exposed. The menfolk of the parish discover what has been happening to their wives and daughters and Lumb is hounded out and killed.

Two of the female characters in this hideous story demand attention: Maud and Felicity. Maud, the housekeeper of the duplicate Lumb, while walking once in an empty graveyard, finds another woman walking ahead of her. Maud follows this woman who walks to the far end of the path and then disappears. Maud walks up to the foot of the last grave and finds there a bare stone with "a lonely engraved word *Gaudete*." (G. p. 94). ("*Gaudete*", meaning "Rejoice", is the name of a Christmas hymn that opens with these words: "*Gaudete, gaudete Christus est natus / Ex Maria virginæ gaudete*").³ Hughes in an interview says that this other woman is the one whom the original Lumb failed to cure in the subterranean world; that "Maud is her Doppelganger and so in a way has control over Lumb to bring about this renovation of women and therefore of life in general in this world."⁴ Maud kneels at the last grave, rearranges some small sea-shells on it, prays and weeps. This grave may give her a premonition of her death or suggest her death-in-life condition. Her life as the housekeeper of Lumb remains uncreative, unfulfilled. Her failure in her assigned role as woman and a potential mother makes her weep.

Felicity, the innocent young girl who seeks "safety and assurance" in Lumb's embrace, who wants to believe that the photograph showing one of Lumb's sexual escapades "was faked" (G, p. 124), who loves Lumb and wants to be "an ordinary wife" (G, p.147), cannot fulfil her dreams. She becomes a victim of Lumb's lust and is killed by Maud. Finally, Maud also kills herself with Lumb's dagger.

The "woman tangled in the skins of wolves" (G, p. 14), the ghostly woman in the graveyard, Maud, and Felicity seem to be linked in the story through the two Lumbs. They represent three aspects of the eternal female: the virgin, the housekeeper, and the old hag. The idea of a composite figure of woman is confirmed in the image of "the baboon woman" (G, p. 105) whom Lumb draws from out of "a well of liquid mud" (G, p. 103). When rain washes the mud from her face, Lumb sees:

It is a woman's face,
A face as if sewn together from several faces.
A baboon beauty face,
A crudely stitched patchwork of faces,
But the eyes slide,
Alive and electrical, like liquid liquorice behind the stitched lids.

(G, p. 104)

Lumb once "sees her face underformed and perfect" but then is "Blinded again with liquid"; as he frees himself from her embrace, he crawls out of the river, "glossed as an exhausted otter" (G, p. 106). He sees "His van sits empty, the doors wide open, as if parked for a picnic". The image of the otter suggests Lumb's double-life; in some momentary hallucination he sees the figure of his bride—"she gushes from between his legs" (G, p. 105)—the female part of his self; it reminds one of Eve's emergence from the ribs of Adam. But once out of the water, amid light, Lumb enjoys himself in a "picnic" of sexual escapades. Thus, the narrative becomes a drama of the struggle of unification of the split parts of the self as well as the right relationship between man and woman.

Although *Gaudete* is constructed around a core of a narrative, there are many gaps in the narration; the reader is forced to assume many things in order to establish the logic and make out a coherent narrative.

Hughes develops a mystery atmosphere in the world of the main narrative. Lumb is shown to possess some "magical implements" like a "glass ball" in which visions of future events can be seen, and an "ebony hilted dagger" (G, pp. 63-64). He is said to be visited by spirits: in one episode Lumb is described as fighting with a "naked stranger" whom he recognizes as "his own double" who wanted to abduct Felicity toward the lake (G, pp. 79-83); in another incident "stub-fingered, hairy-backed hands" wrench the steering wheel of Lumb's car and cause a crash; in yet another episode he is seen being beaten mercilessly with sticks and cudgels by "shapes of men" whose "bodies are deformed by oilskins" (G, pp. 98-99). Sometimes he "recognizes voices from his past, distinct and sudden, behind him and beside him". In one sequence, he sees all the men of his parish "crushed into the mud", all dead, and all the women "buried alive" (G, pp. 101-103).

When Felicity takes a drink served by Maud, she "sees the church

... looks like an evil black shape painted on a wall" (G, p. 104). When she is made to eat some "mushroom sandwich", she feels that "A tiger /Is trying to adjust its nīaniac flame-barred strength to her body" (G, p. 140); she also feels that she and all the women "are moving inside the body of an incandescent creature of love. ... They are the cells in the glands of an inconceivably huge and urgent love-animal" (G, p. 142). Then there is the description of the ritual, amid "hobbling, noddling, four-square music", (G, p. 139) and smoke of burning herbs, in which Lumb deflowers Felicity, mounting her "from behind, like a stag" (G, p. 146).

From all such details, the reader has to make out another level of significance of the narrative, of the obscene violence and horrible emptiness lurking below the placid, genteel surface of life in a quiet picturesque idyllic setting.

After the "cancellation" of the duplicate Lumb, the original Reverend Nicholas Lumb reappears on the West Coast of Ireland. Three small girls find a notebook containing short poems, left by Lumb ... on a boulder down by the sea-lough" (G, p. 173). The poems, which are "hymns and psalms to a nameless female deity" (G, p. 9) reveal that the Reverend Lumb has finally been able to recognize the pre-Christian Celtic fertility goddess symbolized in the Prologue by the "beautiful woman who seems to be alive and dead" (G, p. 15).

He no more says that "there is nothing he can do/For this beautiful woman"; now he can write:

I hear your congregations at their rapture
Cries from birds, long ago perfect
And from the awkward gullets of beasts
That will not chill into syntax. (G, p. 176)

He has recognized both her beauty and her terror, and accepted them both:

Trying to be a leaf
In your kingdom
For a moment I am a leaf
And your fulness comes. (G, p. 180)

The two Lumbs, one excessively spiritual and the other excessively instinctual, are the two halves of the same self, unable to come to terms with each other. The resurrected Lumb understands that the only way of self-realization is the way of pain; only suffering can lead to purification from a false sense of sanctity:

Having first given away pleasure—
Which is hard—
What is there left to give?
There is pain.

Pain is hardest of all.
It cannot really be given.

It can only be paid down
Equal, exactly,
To what can be no part of falsehood.

This payment is that purchase. (G, p.192)

Death and dismemberment of the old self must precede rebirth, a conscious sacrifice of the old world has to be made: so he prays to be annihilated and reborn:

I skin the skin
Take the eye from the eye
Extract the entrails from the entrails

I scrape the flesh from the flesh
Pluck the heart
From the heart
Drain away the blood from the blood

Boil the bones till nothing is left
But the bones

I pour away the sludge of brains
Leaving simply the brains
Soak it all
In the crushed-out oil of the life

Eat

Eat (G, p.196)

The reborn Lumb now recalls with joy his ritual flogging: it is no more a painful experience; the bliss of a new birth has transformed it all. A beautiful poem—"I see the oak's bride in the oak's grasp" (G, p. 183)—recounts this joy of remembrance. Now he can recognize the mother as truly his bride, he can now face the truth unflinchingly. The sights and sounds of the biological kingdom,—“annunciation of clay, water and the sunlight” (G, p. 199)—suggest a supremely earthly yet divine joy of union.

To recognize the true significance of the mother goddess of the fertility cults prevalent in all parts of the world—that she is both mother and bride as, for instance, embodied in the myth of Attis and Cybele—is to resolve the agonizing contradictions and achieve the totality of life. Lumb, through his vision of union with the goddess as his bride, as presented in “I see the oak's bride”, achieves this wholeness of life; he triumphs in his quest for the integrated self.

Hughes has spoken about three sources for the Epilogue poems: the South Indian Vacana poems, translated by A. K. Ramanujan; his fear that he might have cancer; and certain dreams that he had dreamt. These

poems of *Gaudete* reveal a subtle personal sense of grace and transcendence. He feels that the form of these poems—expression of “bhakti” (devotion) in simple, direct ways, in the manner of “vacanas”, “has no real context in English....because its context is, in fact, Goddess religions, in particular, the Indian mystical experience.”⁷ And yet these poems have a strong lyric intensity. Their effect emerges from their fusion of praise with an acute awareness of one’s own inadequacy and feeling of pain. Taken collectively, they express at once an acceptance of agony and of joy, a vision of fullness.

Cave Birds: “The dirt becomes God.” (CB, p. 60)

Cave Birds: An Alchemical Cave Drama is Hughes’s most tightly organized dramatization of the quest for self-discovery. The poem-sequence has a rather complicated textual history. The collaboration with Leonard Baskin required several poems to be added to the original group of nine poems; a few others were dropped later.⁸ But the latest version published in 1978 has a remarkable unity of structure. Some of the poems like “In these fading moments I wanted to say” and “Something was happening” may stand, “quite outside the bird-drama”,⁹ but they do, with their evocation of scenes from domestic life (“But after the bye-byes, and even before the door closed, even while the lips still moved”, etc., CB, p. 20, or, “As I hung up my coat and vent through into the kitchen”, etc. CB, p. 30), add a familiar dimension to the apparently mysterious process “concerning disintegration and re-integration”¹⁰, and suggest that it is after all a dramatization of “the stages in the destruction and renewal of an essentially human protagonist”¹¹.

It has already been suggested that the subtitle to *Cave Birds* hints at the close correspondence between the protagonist’s crisis and resolution on the one hand, and the alchemical processes of transformation, on the other (See pp. 36-39 Chapter III ‘Alchemy’). Man’s inadequate, divided being is transmuted into a complete one, into an integrated, liberated, creative self, and the event is presented as a “cave drama”—a drama (conflict, crisis, attempts at recovery, wrong steps, oppositions and aids, and finally, ending all suspense, a victory) of the cave (the inner nature). The word “cave” has several implications; it recalls the alchemist’s crucible in which the transformation of the prima materia takes place; it stands for the body of the protagonist (“wet cave” for intestine, CB, p. 26); in its symbolic meaning of “womb” it creates resonances of the idea of gestation and rebirth that become so evident towards the end of the cycle (“The risen”, CB, p. 60).

The plot outline of this symbolic drama is as follows: The opening poem (“The scream”) presents the hero’s sudden crisis due to his many inadequacies and failures in dealing with the external world. The hero’s

self splits into two of its component parts: a male being ("The accused", *CB*, p. 24) and a female being ("The plaintiff", *CB*, p. 18). As he has to face trial for his failure, other court-room characters are introduced: "The summoner" (*CB*, p. 8), "The interrogator" (*CB*, p. 12), "The judge" (*CB*, p. 16) and "The executioner" (*CB*, p. 22). "The accused" confesses his crimes ("blood-aberrations") and presents his dismembered limbs for purification (p. 24). He starts his journey for recovery with charts in hand (p. 26) and submits himself to the processes of the earth. After making a little progress ("The knight", *CB*, p. 26), he realizes the necessity of total "annihilation", of turning into "a drop of unbeing", which will eventually make him "like a new foetus" (*CB*, p. 34). "The baptist" (*CB*, p. 36) then immerses him in purificatory water. But he falls in the trap of a false guide ("A green mother", *CB*, p. 40). He loses his way in errors ("As I came, I saw a wood", *CB*, p. 42), meets his true guide (*CB*, p. 50) and finally in "Walking bare" (*CB*, p. 54) attains awareness of the self. A marriage of his conflicting elements is celebrated and consummated in "Bride and groom lie hidden for three days" (*CB*, p. 56). The hero is reborn with a liberated and creative self: "His each wingbeat—a convict's release./What he carries will be plenty". ("The risen", *CB*, p. 60).

The broad alchemical structure helps Hughes to explore with symbolic imagery the dynamics of the human psyche. In the first poem of the sequence, "The scream", Hughes presents the unorganized, "raw" self of man which needs to be "cooked" to be perfected. This raw self is like the Stone of the Philosophers which the alchemical adept sets out to identify and "cook": the "scream" is this self, so long suppressed in the depth of the hero's unconscious. In a moment of crisis the "scream" comes out in the open:

Like an obsidian dagger, dry, jag-edged,
A silent lump of volcanic glass,

The scream
Vomited itself. (*CB*, p. 7)

Volcano is symbolic of the dark seething depth of the unconscious. "Obsidian", the volcanic rock, and "jag-edged" indicate the rigid but unfinished form of this self. It is a silent scream, ejected but inorganic, murderous like a "dagger". This self needs to be transformed, the "dirt" must become "God", as Hughes puts it in the penultimate poem "The Risen".

The occasion for this crisis has been hinted at here as well as in another poem "The accused". The hero has so far led a rather inadequate life, and his development has been one-sided in that he has never faced his existential problems in the way they should be. He has substituted

an encounter with the truth for a childish, or falsely romanticized, view of reality:

There was the sun on the wall—my childhood's
Nursery picture. And there was my gravestone
Which shared my dreams, and ate and drank with me happily.

All day the hawk perfected its craftsmanship
And even through the night the miracle persisted.

Mountains lazed in their smoky camp.
Worms in the ground were doing a good job.

Flesh of bronze, stirred with a bronze thirst,
Like a newborn baby at the breast,
Slept in the sun's mercy. (CB, p. 7)

The tone, diction and rhythm of these lines may remind one of Blake's *Songs of Innocence*: lines like "The Sun does arise/And make happy the skies" or "He shall follow his sheep all day,/And his tongue shall be filled with praise".¹² But at the same time enough hint is given to suggest that this is not the world of innocent childhood, but this is merely the regressive behaviour of an adult. He romanticizes death and very self-consciously justifies his inanity by comparing with self-pity his "flesh of bronze, and bronze thirst" to a suckling baby. Later, when the process of self-realization starts, he would confess, "How imbecile innocent I am" (CB, p. 20). And this pattern of behavior — taking recourse to habitual stereotypes, received clichés and reactions that are more acceptable to society when confronted with real pain, death or distress — is the theme of the next few lines of "The scream", too:

And the inane weights of iron
That come suddenly crashing into people, out of nowhere,
Only made me feel brave and creaturely.
When I saw little rabbits with their heads crushed on roads
I knew I rode the wheel of the galaxy.

.....
And my mate with his face sewn up
Where they'd opened it to take something out
Raised a hand
He smiled, in half-coma.
A stone temple smile.
Then I, too, opened my mouth to praise. (CB, p. 7)

Rationalizing and taking a detached view of others' pain and suffering leads to a loss of what Jung calls the "psychic connection".¹³ Being human means sharing others' pain empathetically, spontaneously, not developing "a condition of instinctual atrophy". This "condition of instinctual atrophy" is the result of losing touch with the primordial images lying in the collective unconscious of man, of a one-sided development of the conscious will and achieving what Jung calls "Promethean freedom"¹⁴.

of relying solely on, one's "hard brain—the sacred assassin" (CB, p. 24). Hughes identifies the accused as the male principle in contrast to "The plaintiff" who is presented as a female. This male character is dismembered and the traits of his limbs are examined and fixed:

THE ACCUSED

Confesses his body—
The gripful of daggers.

And confesses his skin—the bedaubed, begauded
Eagle-dancer.

His heart—
The soul-stuffed despot.

His stomach—
The corpse-eating god.

And his hard life-lust—the blind
Swan of insemination.

And his brain—the sacred assassin. (CB, p. 24)

As the brain of the accused is characterized as an "assassin" ("sacred" must be ironic), it may be taken to suggest that because of the self-righteous tyranny of the brain, his "body" has become a belligerent, evil instrument of murder instead of a sacred creator; his "skin" flaunts his seductiveness; his "heart" has been hardened into an assertive, tyrannical, dominant "despot" and because of the brain's repressive powers, love has turned into merely a "blind" force of "insemination", into merely hard "life-lust"; "hard", "blind" and "lust" all indicate the lack of tenderness and creative joy in love. Here "brain" is the representative of the accepted morality, the super-ego, in Freudian vocabulary. By refusing to recognize and accept the powers of the life instincts, the super-ego has become, to put it in Freud's words, a "kind of gathering place for the death instincts".¹⁵ The superego must learn, like a successful alchemist, to enact a happy fusion of Eros and Thanatos. As he has failed in this task, he is accused by "The plaintiff".

"The plaintiff" (p. 18) reveals the real nature of the "scream" that has become, because of the one-sided repression of the brain, "like an obsidian dagger". She is presented like the skylark of Shelley¹⁶, through a series of images: "the bird of light", "your moon of pain", "the wise night-bird", "your smile's shadow", "the life-divining bush of your desert", "The heavy-fruited, burning tree/Of your darkness", "winged flower". The image of the moon not only identifies the plaintiff with the alchemical female principle or Mercury, but also with a cyclical force of growth and decay, as found in mythology or popular beliefs. Pliny's *Natural History*, for instance, records:

We may certainly conjecture that the moon is not unjustly regarded as the star of our life. This it is said that replenishes the earth; when she approaches it, she fills all bodies, while, when she recedes, she empties them . . . also, that the blood of man is increased or diminished in proportion to the quantity of her light.¹⁷

This force of fertility, decay and growth, of death and rebirth, which moves in a cyclical manner, again, is in sharp contrast to the linear, logical movement of "the hard brain" of "The accused" who knows only how to assassinate and whose "stomach" is a "corpse-eating god". This brain of "the accused" can turn life into a "desert" by its arid, rational, positivist ideas; but the plaintiff tries to understand life through intuition, magic, imagination and revelation: "This bird/Is the life-divining bush of your desert". Along with the strong suggestion of fertility ("the heavy-fruited . . . tree"), the plaintiff is also portrayed as possessing the purifying fire that would transform base metals into gold: she is "the bird of light", the "burning tree"; these two images are then coalesced in one: "Her feathers are leaves, the leaves tongues,/the tongues flames/The feet/Roots". The accused hero has wronged this bird, his "heart's winged flower", by thrusting it down in his chest, and consequently turned the fertile, beautiful force into "a humbling weight/That will not let you breathe". Now the moment of crisis has come when this victim must "supplant" the despotic heart of the hero.

So in these two poems, "The plaintiff" and "The accused", Hughes attempts to identify the two opposite principles of the self that must be united in the great work of alchemy. They may be named variously as male and female, Sol and Luna, Sun and Moon, God and Devil, Animus and Anima, Intellect and Energy, Apollo and Dionysus, Mars and Venus, or Adonis and Venus. The cause of the "desert" is the separation and distortion of these two aspects. No one is self-sufficient. There is discord and crisis because these two are not fused together in a relationship of harmony, balance and agreement. The alchemists dreamt of this great "marriage". Hughes suggests in *Cave Birds* that these contraries can be reconciled in an alchemical marriage and the distorted, narrow and exclusive conceptions of good and evil can be replaced by an inclusive vision of human life.

But before putting these contrary principles into the Philosophers' Egg, keeping it in the Athanor (furnace) and putting the Athanor on fire, that is, before the start of the first stage of the alchemical process, Hughes introduces a few more court-room characters: the summoner, the interrogator, the judge and the executioner—with the suggestion of a process of trial, of the identification of guilt. This recognition and confession of guilt must precede the process of initiatory death, renewal and resurrection. The trial takes place in "the courts of the after-life" (CB, p. 12). All these characters are presented as monstrous, fearful or

ugly birds: the summoner is said to be "Spectral, gigantified/Protozoic, blood-eating" (CB, p. 8); the interrogator "The blood-louse/Of ether /With her prehensile goad of interrogation/. . . She ruffles the light that chills the startled eyeball" (CB, p. 12); the judge's "gluttony/Is a strange one—his leavings are guilt and sentence" (CB, p. 16); and the executioner is presented as an all-devouring black bird who "Fills up/Sun, moon, stars" (CB, p. 22), indeed, everything. But these diabolic, wrathful vultures and eagles have a positive role to play in the drama of the hero's transformation: they help him to separate his essence from his outworn, barren past, they make him realize that his sterile existence was a failure and therefore he must strive to pass on to another mode of being, a new life. These characters thus present a court-room scene which may be seen as a Prologue to the main alchemical drama.

The first episode of this drama is to be found towards the end of "The accused": the accused hero "confesses" the nature of his body and then heaps his limbs for incineration and annealing:

On a flame-horned mountain-stone, in the sun's disc,
He heaps them all up, for the judgement.

So there his atoms are annealed, as in x-rays,
Of their blood-aberration—

His muddled body, lord of middens, like an ore,
To rainbowed clinker and a beatitude. (CB, p.24)

It is analogical of the alchemical work of putting the *materia prima* with all its impurities and superfluities in the furnace-fire. The "sun's disc" and "the flame-horned mountain-stone" correspond to the circular *vas Hermeticum* (also called "uterus", "matrix"¹⁶) where the transformation takes place, and the Athanor or furnace¹⁷ of the alchemists respectively. "Anneal" suggests the process of toughening of glass or metals by heating. The whole process is symbolic of the beginning of the purification process of the hero's still separate and hostile-to-each-other elements ("atoms"; "muddled body", "ore") of mind and body. The hero's dunghill-like body ("lord of middens") after annealing becomes like "rainbowed clinker" and acquires a blessedness. Psychologically speaking, it suggests that the hero's conventional personality consisting of many fictions, illusions and adornments is stripped of these things. He has a glimpse of reality, of the essence that he is: it is many-coloured like the rainbow. Freed from repressions and distortions he experiences a sort of "beatitude". This is a step forward in the road to self-development.

But the journey to the final truth is long, arduous, full of boredom and perils. In order to get the Philosophers' Stone or the Elixir Vitae, the alchemists take resort to numerous procedures, "ranging from the sevenfold to the thousandfold distillation, or from the 'work of one day'

to 'the errant quest' lasting for decades".²⁰ They have various names for these procedures like *mortificatio*, *interfectio*, *putrefactio*, *combustio*, *incineratio*, *calcinatio* etc.²¹ Similarly, the synthesis of the disparate elements of the self can be achieved through numerous efforts, many false starts, failures, recapitulations and resumptions of the quest.

Many poems of *Cave Birds* record such essays and experiences, trials, tribulations and errors and partial success of the hero before he realizes his ultimate goal. "First, the doubtful charts of skin" (CB, p. 26) is one such poem. The imagery in this poem suggests that in course of the hero's quest with a map of skin, the superfluities, make-believes and artificial contrivances ("harmless, irrelevant marvels") are gradually disappearing and the essential facts are emerging slowly. He sees into the mechanism of the body ("wet cave") with its limbs. "Web of veins" suggests the trappings of mere passions and blind instincts, which again embody the "giant spider". Finally, after some more experiences of illuminations ("skull-hill of visions"), afflictions ("valley of screams") and sensual pleasure ("the islands of women"), the hero touches the nadir ("bones") of his purposeless, impure existence, and reaches the verge of extinction. "Bones", "graves" and "epitaph" suggest a state of death, but at the same time, the presence of "Wild horses, with blowing tails and manes/ Standing among graves" hints the presence of the life-instincts. A hope of victory comes back to him: under a prehistoric rock ("menhir") he finds "weapons" that would enable him to continue his journey. The "menhir" may embody an awareness of selfhood—what Hughes in a later poem calls "the gem of myself" ("Walking bare", CB, p. 54) which gives him the required tenacity, insight, humility to go on. However, this awareness is also not final: it is fleeting, only a passing stage.

In the next poem ("The knight", CB, p. 28) the hero wins his victory by surrendering everything which has so far puffed up his conscious ego: "And already/Nothing remains of the warrior but his weapons/ And his gaze". His "weapons" signify a realization and an acceptance of the processes of nature. His growth is an analogy of the natural processes:

- He has conquered in earth's name
Committing these trophies

To the small madness of roots, to the mineral stasis
And to rain.

.....
His sacrifice is perfect. He reserves nothing.

Skylines tug him apart, winds drink him,
Earth itself unravels him from beneath—

His submission is flawless.

And yet the knight has still a long way to go: "While hour by hour the sun/Strengthens its revelation", his education is not yet over.

"The gatekeeper" (CB, p. 32) is a further stage in his development. In alchemical illustrations depicting the stage "Death", it is found that after conjunction, "king and queen are dead and have melted into a single being with two heads".²² Though this stage symbolizes the death of a once-living creature, it is also at the same time called conception, as the alchemists believed that "corruptio unius generatio est alterius"—the corruption of one is the generation of the other.²³ So the opposites have died, their two bodies have become one corpse. But as the opus is not yet over, the two heads have still remained separate. Thus the corpse is called a "gate keeper", "A sphinx./A two-headed questioner". It is a very difficult stage for it can lead either to a new life, or, if a wrong choice is made, it can lead to failure. The birth-pang of the self can already be heard:

Your cry is like a gasp from a corpse.
Everything comes back. And a wingspread
Nails you with its claws. And an eagle
Is flying
To drop you into a bog or carry you to eagles. (CB, p. 32)

The corruption-generation theme is more vividly and graphically presented in "A flayed crow in the hall of judgment" (CB, p. 34). When the accused is executed, total darkness envelops him. But this darkness is only an interim stage—it makes "an egg" and conceives "a new fetus":

Darkness has all come together, making an egg.
Darkness in which there is now nothing.
.....
Nothingness came close and breathed on me—a frost
A shawl of annihilation has curled me up like a new foetus. (CB, p. 34)

The hero's being swallowed by darkness represents an initiatory death, and what it "means above all is that one liquidates the past, one puts an end to one existence, which, like all profane existence, is a failure, to begin again, regenerated, in another". So initiatory death is not merely "the only possible way of . . . annulling historic existence" but also a means of "re-entering into the primordial situation", "into the germinal state of the beginnings"²⁴. The alchemists call this darkness or blackness their "black crow, or their black raven",²⁵ which explains the presence of "crow" in the title of this poem. But the travails of the birth of the new mode of life are legion; the process of self-discovery is full of uncertainty, anxiety and danger; at the same time it is not without a gleam of hope. John Pordiage, an English theologian and alchemist, describes this procreation and its prospects thus:

Now although the Tincture is conceived in the womb of your humanity and is awakened to life, yet there is still a great danger, ... because it is still in the body or womb, it may yet be spoiled by neglect before it be brought in due season into the light....

This child, this tincturing life, must be assayed, proved, and tried in the qualities of nature; and here again great anxiety and danger will arise, seeing that it must suffer the damage of temptation in the body and womb, and you may thus lose the birth. For this tender child of life must descend into the forms and qualities of nature, that it may suffer and endure temptations and overcome it; it must needs descend into the Divine Darkness; also it must be tempted by Lucifer and the million devils who dwell in the quality of the wrathful fire....

Now it seems to the artist that all his work is lost. .. Here is nothing that is apparent, that can be perceived, recognized, or tasted, but darkness, yet he does not see that the Tincture of Life is in this putrefaction or dissolution and destruction, that there is light in this darkness, life in this death, love in this fury and wrath....²⁶

This description vividly presents the descent and the ascent, the fear and hope, the weakness and the patience that must precede the gradual easing off of tension between the opposing forces of one's self, and the attainment of wholeness of one's self. Here is Hughes's presentation of this state:

I rise beyond height I fall past falling.
I float on an air
As mist-balls float, and as stars.
A condensation, a gleam simplification
Of all that pertained.
This cry alone struggled in its tissues.

Where am I going? What will come to me here?
Is this everlasting? Is it
Stoppage and the start of nothing?

Or am I under attention?
Do purposeful cares incubate me?
Am I the self of some spore

In this white of death blackness,
This yoke of afterlife?

What feathers shall I have? What is my weakness good for? (CB, p. 34)

Amid such doubts and fears, the new-born self decides to bear all his suffering passively, patiently:

I shall not fight
Against whatever is allotted to me.

My soul skinned, and the soul-skin laid out
A mat for my judges. (CB, p. 34)

In the next poem we meet "The baptist" (CB, p. 36) who comes to purify the black body of the crow. This process in alchemy is called "albedo" or "dealbatio" (whitening) or "mundificatio" (purification). The baptist

"Enfolds" the hero "In winding waters, a swathing of balm/A mummy bandaging/Of all [his] body's puckering hurts/In the circulation of the sea". This water has many synonyms in alchemy: "aqua benedicta", the lustral water that kills and vivifies, the "aqua permanens", the divine water or "aqua sapientiae", water that makes the candidate ready for the divine gift of illumination and wisdom.²⁷ The poem ends with an image of "a seed in its armour" which indicates that the hero has yet to go a long way to attain maturity.

But in the course of his long journey he sometimes falters and strays. In "A green mother" (CB, p. 40) the hero meets a false guide.²⁸ She offers him an easy alternative, a short-cut to hard-earned bliss and rebirth:

Why are you afraid?
 In the house of the dead are many cradles.
 The earth is a busy hive of heavens.
 This is one lottery that cannot be lost.

 The city of religions
 Is like a city of hotels, a holiday city.
 I am your guide.
 In none of these is the aftertaste of death
 Pronounced poor. The earth is heaven's sweetness.

The alliterations in lines 3, 6, 9; the image of "a busy hive of heavens" or "a holiday city" and the easy assurances, the smoothness of language, the guide's style of selling the exhibits and the cheap familiarity of lottery—all these make the "guidance" of the "green mother" suspect. "Green", in contrast to white or red, also suggests lack of wisdom. The heavens the "green mother" describes are those of oblivion. The real heaven is attained the hard way, in "the bitumen of blood and the smoke of tears", through crucifixion and resurrection. This is a false hope.

Again, the next poem, "As I came, I saw a wood" (CB, p. 42), the hero seems to have lost his way, as Spenser's Red Cross Knight lost his way in the Wandering Wood, the wood of error²⁹:

I could see I stood in a paradise of tremblings
 At the crowded crossroads of all the heavens
 The festival of all the religions.

Again, the texture of the verses in which the "wood" is described suggests that it is not really "a paradise of tremblings", it is merely an illusion, a make-believe, a fake vision.

The true guide appears in "The guide" (CB, p. 50). The true guide enjoins upon him that there is no easy way out, which he must ceaselessly go on searching;

And we go

Into the red wind. The flame-wind—a red wind
And a black wind. The red wind comes
To empty you. And the black wind, the longest wind
The headwind

To scour you.

.....
I am the needle

.....
The searcher

The finder.

In "Walking bare" (*CB*, p. 54) the hero discovers his essential self: now he can confront his self without the need for illusions, make-believes and other fictitious assortments:

What is left is just what my life bought me
The gem of myself.
A bare certainty, without confection.
Through this blowtorch light little enough

But enough.

The purification process, after repeated distillation, is now over. The hero can now withstand any temptation, any suffering. So he is now ready for the ultimate union with the queen, who is also supposed to have passed through such a process of death and rebirth.

And so the next poem, "Bride and groom lie hidden for three days" (*CB*, p. 56) celebrates their marriage. Alchemists have called this union by various names like "conjunctio", "matrimonio", "coitus", and so on. In Hughes's poem the bride and the groom give each other what either of them lacks. And

So, gasping with joy, with cries of wonderment
Like two gods of mud
Sprawling in the dirt, but with infinite care

They bring each other to perfection.

Psychologically, this can be interpreted thus: for a man, it is a discovery and acknowledgement of his unconscious female aspect (anima), and for a woman, it is an awareness and acceptance of her unconscious male aspect (animus). The woman's animus generates "philosophical" ideas and tries to discern and discriminate. The man's anima, in the form of Sapiencia or Sophia, wants to reconcile and unite. When anima and animus, in both man and woman, are in conflict with each other, neither can find fulfilment. When the union takes place, neither man nor woman will feel the need for projection of their unconscious-content on the "other" and thus suffer from a sense of division, conflict and restlessness. Each will achieve a wholeness.

The image of this whole being, the resurrected hero, is presented in the penultimate poem "The risen" (CB, p. 60). He is imagined as a liberated person who possesses the potentiality of an unlimited extension of consciousness: "His each wingbeat — a convict's release. / What he carries will be plenty". He does not have the suppressive rationalistic mindset, but rather has an inclusive vision of wholeness:

On his lens
Each atom engraves with a diamond.

In the wind-fondled crucible of his splendour
The dirt becomes God. (CB, p. 60)

He is also described as "A burning unconsumed. / A whirling tree". It is not suggested that his suffering has ended; he will continue to carry the flames that burn up superfluities, but his essence will remain "unconsumed". The "tree" image suggests the *arbor philosophica* of the alchemists which is a symbol of the process of growth and which in alchemical illustrations is found just beside the end-product of the opus.³⁰ Nature creates, out of opposition, a new birth, but it is not a totally new third thing—it contains both the opposites in a harmonious relationship: Hughes employs the image of the "cross" for this new figure:

When he soars, his shape
Is a cross, eaten by light,
On the Creator's face. (CB, p. 60)

According to Jung, "the cross as a form of suffering expresses psychic reality, and carrying the cross is therefore an apt symbol for the wholeness and also for the passion which the alchemist saw in his work".³¹ Thus, the experience of the wholeness of the self actually includes the opposites and creates a sense of equilibrium. It is "not so much perfection as completeness".³² 's comment is very much to the point:

The realization 'This is what I am' . . . reveals a unity which nevertheless is,—or was—a diversity. No longer the earlier ego with its make-believes and artificial contrivances, but another, "objective" ego, which for this reason is better called the "self". No longer a mere selection of suitable fictions, but a string of hard facts, which together make up the cross we all have to carry or the fate we ourselves are . . . ; like the alchemical end-product, which always betrays its essential duality, the united personality will never quite lose the painful sense of innate discord. Complete redemption from the sufferings of this world is and must remain an illusion. Christ's earthly life likewise ended, not in complacent bliss, but on the cross The goal is important only as an idea; the essential thing is the *opus* which leads to the goal: *that* is the goal of a lifetime.³³

In the last two lines of "The risen", Hughes, in spite of the possibility of being misunderstood³⁴, acknowledges this reality of the human situation:

But when will he land
On a man's wrist.

He acknowledges that the goal or unity can only remain an idea which can inspire man to undertake the quest. It is the idea of the new life, of easing off of the tension, that will never allow man to be complacent in his journey of life. So the "symbolic drama" ends with a warning in the "Finale":

At the end of the ritual
up comes a goblin.

The "goblin" is the "other", the projection of contents of the unconscious, —which divides a man into two and starts the process of conflict, dissension and tension, necessitating the initiation process, the "thousandfold distillation" of the alchemical *opus*.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

ECOLOGY AND POETRY

Towards the end of 1976 Hughes felt, as he wrote to Daniel Huws on 22 December 1976, that although he had written "a fair amount over the last 2 or 3 years", in the year 1976 he had written "very little"; he continued: "I had a strong feeling of having come to the end of something, and not quite knowing how to get through to the next phase, assuming there is a next phase."¹ Indeed, by 1976 he had finished the three great sequences—*Crow*, (1970, 1972), *Cave Birds* (the 31 core-group poems were completed by 1975, although the expanded Faber edition was published in 1978)², and *Gaudete* (completed in 1976, published in 1977). Meanwhile, he has written some nature poems which are "within hearing of children"³ (*Season Songs*, published in the USA in 1975, Faber edition in 1976). He hoped that *Season Songs* was "going to sell an unusually large number of copies".⁴ In 1976, too, he started composing odd Yorkshire pieces and the idea of doing a book of poems on Yorkshire landscape with photographs of Fay Godwin revived after five years.⁵ In a long letter to Fay Godwin on 4 July 1976 Hughes presented an outline of their proposed book "which suddenly resurrected and proposed itself."⁶

By this time Hughes has become seriously concerned and actively involved with the dangers of environmental degradation. Even as a young boy in the 1940s he saw on a South Yorkshire farm the disastrous effects of silage on fish⁷. Then in 1959 in the USA he read an article in *The Nation* on how the mackerel around Cape Cod got radioactive because of the dumping of US atomic waste in sea water off Boston⁸. But Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* (1962), regarded as a basic text of modern ecological movement, made him fully aware of the devastating effects of pesticides and agricultural chemicals on bird population, wildlife, green landscape and human life, causing an eco-catastrophe⁹. However, in the 1960s in England the rivers "were pretty full of fish" and so there was no cause for alarm. But in 1969 the disease ulcerative dermal necrosis that attacked the salmon made him suspect "the cumulative weakening effects on fish of the increasing chemical load on the rivers"¹⁰.

This resulted in his getting more seriously and proactively involved with ecological issues in the 1970s. He reviewed Max Nicholson's book

The Environmental Revolution perceptively in 1970¹¹. He wrote letters anonymously to *The Times* "on fish stocks and on injecting cattle with steroids"¹². Even in a *Crow* poem "Revenge Fable" he suggested the interconnectedness of all the life-forms within a single biosphere: a person pounded and hacked at his mother "with numbers and equations and laws", "Bulldozers and detergents/Requisitions and central heating /Rifles and whisky and bored sleep."The mother died with "all her babes in her arms", and the man's "head fell off like a leaf". Obviously the poem criticizes the man-induced, science-and-technology-driven pollution of the earth's biosphere with an immense variety of life-forms; it also subtly attacks the anthropocentric attitude that man is the most important creature of the earth ("As if he were her topmost twig", *Crow*, p. 70), and manages to point out the folly of man who fails to realize that human existence will be threatened because of man's indiscriminate and mindless destruction of earth's non-human life-forms and a severe depletion of earth's natural resources.

Indeed, in a letter to Keith Sagar on 30 August 1979 he speaks of "the whole idea of our ecological responsibility, fully developed,— maybe the crucial awakening" and "the idea of ecological interconnectedness" as contributions of the Sixties.¹³ This new ecological awareness is best manifested in *Season Songs*, *Moortown*, *Remains of Elmet*, *River* and *Wolfwatching*. The poems are marked by a spirit suggesting a close relationship between man and non-human species.

Season Songs

Season Songs celebrates these close connections chiefly through the device of personification. In "Deceptions" spring is described in human terms, as an embarrassed, helpless, exasperated host:

With the cherry blossom for her fancy dress
Spring is giving a party—
And we have been invited.
We've just arrived, all excited,
When she rushes out past us weeping, tattered and dirty —
Wind and rain are wrecking the place

And we can go home. (SS, p.29)

Hughes's poetry in these volumes is replete with benign, tender images. In "March Morning Unlike Others" (SS, p. 17) the earth, much damaged, is convalescing and going to be beautiful again: the imagery draws on processes of healing and blooming into life: "After the frightful operation" required, probably, for the ravages of winter, "The earth invalid, dropsied, bruised", is "wheeled/Out into the sun" and now "lies back, wounds undressed to the sun,/To be healed". Although she is "exhausted", but hopeful:

Perhaps dozing a little.
While we sit, and smile, and wait, and know
She is not going to die.

The portrait of "A March Calf" is presented with all tenderness but not without the touch of its earthy real surrounding: Dressed in

A Sunday suit, a wedding natty get-up,
Standing in dunged straw

Under cobwebby beams, near the mud wall,
Half of him legs,
Shining-eyed, requiring nothing more
But that mother's nulk come back often. (SS, p. 13).

The images like "dunged straw", "cobwebby beams", "mud wall" and so on place the calf in the space in which it grows and reveal its vitality in its own natural habitat. It is done with images of all kinds of frisky movement—"he bolts a yard or two", freezes, stares, "swivel-jerks" his eyeball, wobbles his tail,—indeed "He trembles to grow", although the shadows of hungry people and butchers and expanding markets loom large. But it would seem that the poet has not yet lost his hope that the coexistence of the calf and the butchers and their expertise and markets is possible in a sustainable biosphere.

Looking at the oak tree on the first day of April he thinks that it is as bare as it was in December but now appears completely different: "The oak tree's soul has returned and flames its strength./You feel those rays—even though you can't see them/They touch you." ("Spring Nature Notes", SS, p. 21) The regeneration of Nature seems inevitable and irresistible.

"Swifts" (SS, p. 33-35) announces the dramatic arrival of the tiny birds with a long and controlled scream on the "Fifteenth of May". Hughes's verse-rhythm mimics the flickering, to-and-fro flight of the swifts, just as that of the fox in "The Thought-Fox", or that of the "Skylarks" (W, pp. 168-71), in this poem, too:

With a bowing
Power-thrust to left, then to right, then a flicker they
Tilt into a slide, a tremble for balance,
Then a lashing down disappearance

Behind elms. (SS, p. 33)

It is possible that every year a fledgling swift ("nearly-flying Misfit") might flop while "Groggily somersaulting to get airborne", and finally die. But the death of a swift does not stop the cyclic change and renewal of ecology. Most importantly, seeing the early swifts with "their leaden velocity and their butterfly lightness" the poet is reassured of the earth's survival in the face of the threat of the possibility of an ecological crisis:

They've made it again,
Which means the globe's still working, the Creation's
Still waking refreshed, our summer's
Still all to come—
And here they are, here they are again
Erupting across yard stones. (SS, p. 33)

Hughes's imagination and verbal power work hand in hand not only when he observes violent energy-packed objects and actions, but also when he views gentle scenes like the Harvest Moon "Booming softly through heaven, like a bassoon./And earth replies all night, like a deep drum" (SS, p. 50).

Moortown

In the "Moortown" sequence in *Moortown* (1979), revised and published a decade later as *Moortown Diary* (1989), the images stress the man-nature affinity, man's responsibility to and guardianship of the non-human life-forms. These poems were written out of Hughes's experiences of farming in North Devon. Agriculture and livestock farming require the farmer's taking care of land and non-human species. The survival of the sheep, lamb, cow and calf in a farm is impossible without the husbandry of the farmer, just as the flourishing of the farmer is dependent on the wellbeing of the land and the animals. This fact emerges from all the poems of the "Moortown" sequence. There are many images of man feeding or helping to feed the animals (M, p. 21, 53, 60), helping the cow during the difficult birth of a calf (M, p. 34, 39, 44-45), giving shelter to ewes and lambs to save them from the cold (M, 32-33), and even teaching a dumb calf how to suck his mother's milk in the position of the "ancient statue" (M, p. 53-54) or force-feeding a sick calf with "medical power mix" and "pints of glucose water" (M, p. 50). A metaphor for a man deep-rooted in these farming activities is "a tree with two knot-eyes, immovable,/A root among roots, without leaf." (M, p. 66). When this man dies, "the bright fields look dazed", "the trustful cattle, with frost in their backs,/Waiting for hay, waiting for warmth,/Stand in a new emptiness" (M, p. 64).

The mother and child image (cow and calf, ewe and lamb) is present almost in every poem of the "Moortown" sequence, even in an unexpected situation like starting the "Tractor", where "The battery is alive—but, like a lamb/Trying to nudge its solid-frozen mother" (M, p. 29). Craig Robinson aptly remarks that "Hughes has discovered in these poems the utility of a real situation perfectly apt for expressing practical ecological awareness, the sanctity of nature, and the value of man's being in touch with natural energies".¹⁴

However, Hughes does not put any gloss over death, decay and pain. A farm is not immune to death. The "Moortown" sequence has many descriptions of death. Ted Hughes says, "It's extremely difficult to write about the natural world without finding your subject matter turning ugly."¹⁵ His most controversial poem in this volume is "February 17th" (M, pp.39-40). Here during the process of its birth a lamb got stuck in its mother's birth canal. The harried mother, lying on the mud, was groaning and suffering much. The head of the lamb had come out earlier than the rest of the body as probably its hoofs or knees might have stuck inside. The poet like a midwife tried various methods to bring the lamb out safely. But his hand could not go inside the ewe's slippery tunnel past the lamb's neck that blocked its route of birth. Failing in his efforts for the "safe landing" of the lamb, the poet has to take a drastic action to save the life of the mother. He went two miles and brought an injection and a razor. Then he "sliced the lamb's throat-strings", put the severed head on the mud "With all earth for a body". Then he pushed his hand inside and got the knee of the lamb. Finally, synchronizing with the birth push of the ewe he pulled out the headless trunk of the lamb's body that now "lay born, beside the hacked-off head". The notable thing here is that like Hamlet he had to become cruel in order to show mercy to the mother-ewe. The poem can be, indeed has proved to be, emotionally harrowing for some readers. But no farmer can possibly evade making a positive choice when confronted with the dilemma of either saving the life of a mother ewe or letting both the mother and the lamb die because of squeamishness.

The attitude of practical care that the poet reveals in these poems about these farm animals is marked by a complete absence of a modern farmer's concern for making money out of them or earning other kinds of dividends from them. The thought of the market never intrudes in his proactive role during the easing out a difficult birth of a lamb or calf or for saving the life of another sick animal. Rather, he feels it his duty to extend help to the animals that specially need it and when he is in a position to offer help; but he does not claim any special praise or attention for doing so. It would appear that it is akin to what some sociobiologists call "biophilia".¹⁶

It would, however, be inappropriate to characterize this caring attitude to the animals and plants as a "strong ecocentric" view that believes that only the biosphere should be given the central position in our moral considerations and that particular creatures or species including human beings have only a secondary value and cannot claim any privilege.¹⁷ Rather, interconnections and interdependence between humans and nonhumans have been discreetly suggested by Hughes's attitude.

Remains of Elmet

Remains of Elmet shows his greening as a poet quite overtly. Elmet was the ancient British Celtic kingdom that came under the rule of the Angles about two centuries later than the low-lying areas around the Pennine hills chiefly because it was an almost uninhabitable wilderness. The Calder valley—a part of Elmet—was a difficult terrain but very beautiful in its pristine natural beauty with its vast moors, river systems and the majestic slopes of the Pennine hills. But in the early nineteenth century it became the cradle of the industrial revolution. Many textile mills and ancillary industries producing chemical dyes and detergents to wash wool and cotton came up on the banks of the Calder and its tributaries. The chemical effluents of these factories began to pollute the rivers, harm the wildlife and fish. Before industrialization in the Calder valley these rivers had abounded in salmon population which began to dwindle by the middle of the nineteenth century. The large-scale industrial pollution, in short, began to despoil the eco-system of the valley.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century the mills began to close down. The First World War took a heavy toll of human lives of this area. Demography started to change as the younger generation of the local population so long rooted in the area migrated to other areas of England and outsiders began to settle down here. The abandoned mills were restructured to create waterfront projects combining residential buildings, offices, shopping complexes, galleries and public places. Perhaps more attention to conservation measures and stringent control of environmental pollution improved the ecological health of the valley. The biosphere with the reestablishment of lost wildlife and return of fish and proliferation of the red grouse and heather and bracken and grass and bog-cotton now show distinct signs of regeneration.

Ted Hughes expresses both his dismay at the ugliness of human efforts that desecrated the sacred space of the biosphere, and on the other hand, his exhilaration at the signs of Nature recovering lost ground, recuperating and being healed. Of course he does not merely draw a rosy, tourist-attracting picturesque portrait of Elmet: it is presented with all the polluted and devastated segments of the world of nature. The poems bear evidences of the wilful, blind and continuing efforts of the local industrial sector to turn a paradisaal expanse of natural beauty into a "happy hell" (*RE*, p. 7).

In several poems of *Remains of Elmet* Hughes speaks of the debilitating effects of industrialization on this beautiful valley. In "Moors" (*RE*, p. 19) he refers to "electrical terrors/In the eyes of sheep" and the "collapse" of "wraith-lovers" on "the spoil-heaps of quarries". This last image is devastating in its straightforward characterizing of the sinister effects of ecological destruction as senseless loot.

"Long Screams" (*RE*, p. 26) presents his impression of the scene as a valley of death:

Unending bleeding.
Deaths left over.
The dead piled in cairns
Over the dead.
Everywhere dead things for monuments
Of the dead.

In "Hill Walls" (*RE*, p. 30) the industrial enterprise is alluded to as "the blast of space" among the hills and ironically described as an "adventure" resulting in an environmental disaster:

The great adventure had begun—
Even the grass
Agreed and came with them,
And crops and cattle—

No survivors,
Here is the hulk, every rib shattered.

Military images are used throughout the poem "First, Mills" (*RE*, p. 34) to describe the gradual, forcible and wholesale desiccation, mortification and destruction of the valley: with the mills came the cenotaphs; football pitches and greenery were soon followed by the railway station to ferry industrial goods and raw materials. But the railway station proved to be a "single, fatal wound", "the bottomless wound" "That bled this valley to death". The bleeding not only paled "the faces at the windows", but a more chilling image is used to suggest premature loss of vitality: "Even the hair whitened". The military devastation then spread to human habitats: "The towns and villages were sacked". The entire valley turns into a "trench" and the sky appears to be "an empty helmet". And ultimate audacity of the industrial warmongers bent on desecrating the environment is revealed in their forcible requisitioning ("commandeered") of the creations of nature with disastrous effects: "The hills were commandeered/For gravemounds."

The next poem in the sequence, "Hill-Stone Was Content" (*RE*, p. 37), again, in an extraordinary restrained manner, expresses the agony of "slavery" suffered by both man and nature. The cobble allowed itself to be displaced ("cut", "carted", and "fixed" in a new place). Like a helpless victim it had not only to acquiesce to its conscription into mills but had also to stay put in this humiliating condition "Defending this slavery against all". Consequently

It forgot its wild roots
Its earth songs
In cement and the drum-song of looms.

Humans fared no better in this relentless march of industrialization;

indeed they lost their human essence and became indistinguishable from the "conscripted" hill-stones:

And inside the mills mankind
 With bodies that came and went
 Stayed in position, fixed like the stones
 Trembling in the song of the looms.

And they too became four-cornered, stony...

The repetition of the phrase "stayed in position" and the recurrence of the "song of the looms" image in describing both the stones and men reinforce their identical fate. The adjective "four-cornered" indicates the ultimate dehumanization of the men working inside the mills.

Moreover, the constant entry and exit of human bodies inside the mills suggest the suffering of not just one generation of mankind but of many generations of such stony slaves. "The Remains of Elmet" (RE, p. 53) again describes how the industrial expansion and the modernized farming boom on this valley destroyed those that these enterprises had once benefited. Farms are characterized as "stony masticators/Of generations that ate each other", perhaps as a consequence of unsustainable farming practices. Similar lack of awareness about adopting required anti-pollution measures destroyed the vitality of the towns: "The sunk mill-towns were cemeteries/Digesting utterly/All with whom they swelled". Now, ironically, this pain and emptiness of natural beauty of the wilderness ("A wind-parched ache,/An absence") attracts tourists to witness this man-made ecological desolation.

Apart from this poem ("Remains of Elmet"), the stark images of death or enslavement are presented in many poems of *Remains of Elmet*, such as "Hardcastle Crag", "Walls", "Hill-Stone Was Content", "The Sheep Went On Being Dead", "Willow-Herb" and so on. The images of cenotaphs, cemetery and grave are strewn all over this landscape (RE, pp. 13, 33, 44, 53, 79, 87, 89, 90, 122).

But everything is not bleak in this valley. In the battle between nature and thoughtlessly destructive man, the former shows signs of a slow regeneration, and in this recovery heather, bog-cotton, grass (reminding Whitman), harebells, rhododendrons, grouse, snipe, fox, badger, cricket, curlew, a sea of bees and such small plants and animal species and "stones that roam again free" (RE, p. 60) and rain play their roles. As "the millstone grinds the heather's face hard and small", it reveals its indestructibility: "Heather only toughens" (RE, p. 48). The solitary cry of a curlew (RE, p. 26), the "exhilarated water" (RE, p. 54), "the grouse who grew up to trust their kingdom" (RE, p. 60), a snipe that works late in this desolate valley (RE, p. 19), or quickly hurtling "upwards and downwards", drawing fertilizing power of the moonlight "Into its egg" (RE, p. 66)—all surprise the poet with their sure signs of rejuvenation.

In "The Long Tunnel Ceiling" (*RE*, p. 76-78) Hughes comes across in the road-side canal a trout and is astonished to see its beauty and self-poise: "An ingot!/Holy of holies! A treasure! . . . lazy—a free lord". This "Master of the Pennine Pass" not only ignores the poet, but dismisses the traffic. "Brought down . . . /In a shake-up of heaven and the hills" the trout seems to him

A seed
Of the wild god now flowering for me
Such a tigerish, dark, breathing lily
Between the tyres, under the tortured axles. (*RE*, p. 77)

A similar supernatural power is attributed to a cricket that representing the primeval religion threw a challenge to Mount Zion, "Wesley's foundation stone":

Alarm shouts at dusk!
A cricket had rigged up its music
In a crack of Mount Zion wall.
A cricket! The news awful, the shouts awful, at dusk —
Like the bear-alarm, at dusk, among smoky tents —
What was a cricket? How big is a cricket?

Long after I'd been smothered in bed
I heard them
Riving at the religious stonework
With screwdrivers and chisels. (*RE*, p. 82)

"What was a cricket? How big is a cricket?" reminds one of the speaker in William Blake's "The Tyger". For Hughes the tiny cricket is as powerful as Blake's tiger. The use of the past tense in the first rhetorical question implies that the cricket is connected to the indestructible force in Nature which might have died but is reborn. The second question contains a vision that sees the vast continuum of universal and deathless energy in the tiny insect.

In several poems light and the interplay of light and rain are delineated to suggest this regeneration of nature's beauty. In "Light Falls Through Itself" (*RE*, p. 113), we see how beauty returns to this dilapidated scene when "Light falls naked/Into poverty grass, poverty stone,/Poverty thin water." Light becomes the dominant image of beauty, hope and happiness in most of the poems in this volume. "The Trance of Light" (*RE*, p. 20) describes how this land, the hills and procreating rain "fell asleep" under the clatter of machines and Wesley's Methodist preaching ("biblical texts"). The monotony of the life under this regime is vividly presented with the repetitive sound sequences:

Migraine of headscarves and clatter
Of clog-irons and looms
And gutter-water and clog-irons
And clog-irons and biblical texts . . . (*RE*, p. 20)

But the return of the valley from the apocalyptic state is equally memorable. The spread of light transforms the somnolent scene into a bright living being that "stretches awake.... And returns to itself". The light becomes a bird that flies with the whole land on its wings:

Chapels, chimneys, vanish in the brightening

And the hills walk out on the hills

The rain talks to its gods

The light, opening younger, fresher wings

Holds this land up again like an offering

Heavy with the dream of a people. (RE, p. 20)

Similar picture of recovery of joyfulness is portrayed in "Hardcastle Craggs":

But happiness is now broken water at the bottom of a precipice

Where the red squirrel drops shavings from a branch-end of survival

And beech-roots repair a population

Of fox and badger. And the air-stir releases

The love-murmurs of a generation of slaves

Whose bones melted in Asia Minor. (RE, p. 13)

The music created through alliteration, assonance and particular consonant clusters is exhilarating. Other beautiful images of life, of the creative and nourishing power of Mother Nature, abound in this necropolis:

And now this whole scene, like a mother,

Lifts a cry

Right to the source of it all.

A solitary cry.

She has made a curlew. ("Long Screams", RE, p. 26)

The mother image for moor is again employed in "Curlews Lift" in which curlews fly from "out of the maternal watery blue lines". The image of the curlew is a recurrent one signifying the victory of life, just as crow flying in *Crow* is a symbol of the unkillable spirit of life in nature. The primeval animal in "In April" (RE, p. 114) sitting amid the milk-bearing black stones, emphasizes the overcoming of the ecological imbalance and the process of healing and the qualities of sustenance, nourishment, and the power of survival inherent in the environment:

The black stones

Bear bluish delicate milk.

A soft animal of peace

Has come a nullion years....

Has got up from under the glacier

And now lies openly sunning

Huge bones and space-weathered hide

Healing and sweetening
 Stretched out full-length for miles—
 With eyes half-closed, in a quiet cat-ecstasy.

In a group of poems Hughes has combined ecological concerns with cultural and personal memories of this place in and around which he was born and also spent many years of his life. In "Emily Bronte" (*RE*, p. 96) Hughes portrays the eco-conscious intimacy of Emily Bronte, one of the cultural icons born in the wild heartlands the valley. Hughes's imagery describes a romantic fatal love-affair between "The shaggy sodden king of the kingdom" of Crow Hill and Emily Bronte:

The shaggy sodden king of that kingdom
 Followed through the wall
 And lay on her love-sick bed.

The curlew trod in her womb.
 The stone swelled under heart.
 Her death is a baby-cry on the moor.

The image of curlew as her unborn child, the stone as the joyful pain of passionate love, suggesting Emily Bronte's organic relationship with the natural world, finally fuses her with the moor in the image of her death as "a baby-cry" which suggests that through her death she becomes a part of nature's ceaseless process of death and birth: she would be reborn in some form in this world. In the next poem, "Haworth Parsonage" (*RE*, p. 100) his intention is perhaps to suggest the three weird sisters' (Charlotte, Emily and Anne Bronte) oneness with the bleak ecology of the heartlands of the Bronte country:

A house
 Emptied and scarred black.

In a land
 Emptied and scarred black.

The residence of the Bronte sisters, Haworth Parsonage, and the surrounding countryside, are both "Emptied and scarred black". On the other hand, "Heptonstall Cemetery" (*RE*, p. 122) evokes personal memories of both the land and his dear ones: his parents, uncle and aunt and his wife—Thomas, Walter, Edith, Esther and Sylvia. The way towards the cemetery at the top of a hill seems to him to be "a giant beating wing". The members of the family "are living feathers" of that wing. The horizons are also like "dark swans" spreading their wings and "go beating low through storm-silver/Towards the Atlantic." There is complete identification with humans and the non-human environment. This kind of rootedness and complete surrender of the human self to the ecosphere is implied to be desirable in the present world, too.

River

In *River* Hughes expresses his exhilaration in looking at the diversity, vitality and purposivity of multiple life-forms, particularly of the salmon population in diverse rivers in a positive and celebratory note. Hughes had been close to rivers since his childhood. The River Calder in West Yorkshire, the Don in South Yorkshire and the River Taw in Devon (although severely polluted because of industrial effluents) were associated with different stages of his life. Besides, he undertook trips to many other rivers in different countries including Canada, Ireland, Scotland, Kenya and Egypt; he enjoyed his fishing trips with his son Nicholas, then a student of zoology at Oxford University, to Iceland in 1979, to Alaska in 1980 and to Kenya at the source of the Nile in 1982. Rivers fascinated him, as did fish. "Streams, rivers, ponds, lakes *without fish* communicate to me," says he, "one of the ultimate horrors—the poisoning of the wells, death at the source of all that is meant by water." (*CP*, p. 1211)

The conservation of aquatic ecosystems like rivers is critically important for many aquatic and riparian life-forms like fish, waterfowl, migratory birds and plants. They were also like lifelines to man, as Hughes suggests they were to him (*CP*, p. 1211). They absorb the greenhouse gas from the atmosphere and help in purifying the polluted environment. In many cultures rivers are worshipped as deities. In the poems of *River* Hughes celebrates the life-giving and life-enhancing powers of rivers through mythmaking, in a language that blends scientific and religious vocabulary.

Indeed, in these poems, Hughes's imagery achieves a fusion of poetic vision and scientific observation: he seems to have attempted to solve the problem that teases almost every modern man, namely, that poetry and science seem to be antithetical and mutually exclusive. Science that was once called natural philosophy has to be perceived as an integral part of our culture, and has to be employed to remove the dichotomies between science and poetry that seems for the most to be irreconcilable. Hughes reveals his concerns at the misuse of scientific and technological discovery and at the same time is inspired by scientific processes and knowledge. His imagination is kindled by poetic as well as scientific impulses.

In *River* Hughes's imagery mixes scientific concepts and nature's processes as in cinematographic montage. The opening poem suggests that an explosion in the sun creates a flow of energy that sustains life on the earth and it is like a river, that "Crawls and glimmers among heather-topped stones" and "brims out lowly/For cattle to wade." It is

The power-line, alive in its rough trench,
Electrifies the anemones
And the bristling wheat. (R. p. 7)

This "fallen" snake from the sun is "The medicinal mercury creature", "Spinal cord of the prone adoring land,/Rapt/To the roots of the sea, to the blossoming/Of the sea." (R, p. 7) The river is a "Primitive, radical/Engine of earth's renewal" (R, p. 17). "The pool by the concrete buttress" has also an "intricate engine" which "it has just repaired" and "Now revs it full-bore, underground,/Under my footsole,/Tries to split the foundations,/Running in, testing and testing" (R, p. 16). An ewe has to survive in the environment created by the river, it is therefore equipped with adequate technology: "An ewe,/steep-spined, is lowering herself/To the power-coils/of the river's bulge, to replenish her udder" (R, p. 18).

Indeed, the world and its objects here appear as a living machine, loving, creating, and nourishing life and leading to fulfilment in death. A trout leaps into air and then drops immediately into the pool which is a "peculiar engine/That made it and keeps it going" (R, p. 34); a cormorant has a "dinosaur massacre-machine [that]/Hums on in his skull, programme unaltered." (R, p. 61). In "August Evening" the thistles "survive a biological blaze—burnt splinters,/Skeletal carbons, crowned with ashes. The fuel/Nearly all gone" (R, p. 62). The Balsam flower is imagined as having "Electric fingers parting a door curtain/Where smoky music shakes out" (R, p. 68).

Fish and fowl, light and water, here appear to be engaged in the necessary common activities of life. The poet notices "a big-thumbed buzzard now settling/Heavy with domestic purposes" (R, p. 18). He observes "the long ropes of light/Hauling the river's cargo/The oldest commerce" (R, p. 19). He speaks of the tragedy in the life of the salmon that may be "dead within days of marriage" (R, p. 10). He observes the "precarious obstetrics", in a salmon-hatchery, the "clotting", then "loosening" of eggs, "Then, lovingly, the rinsings,/The lavings, the drainings, the rewashing—" (R, pp. 11-12).

The images of bride, bridegroom, and marriage are recurrent in *River*. Such images serve to imply the extension of human institutions and cultural practices to the non-human world and to claim empathy for and an ethical attitude to the other species. In "Salmon-taking Times"

the river emerges
In glistenings, and gossamer bridal veils,
And hovers over itself—there is a wedding
Delicacy— (R, p. 22).

A group of cock minnows is "A stag-party, all bridegrooms, all in their panoply" (R, p. 23). In "August Evening" (R, p. 2) the poet observes: "The sea-tribes are here,/They've come up for their weddings, their Michaelmas fair,/The carnival on the gravels". In "September Salmon" (R, p. 66) the fish "Famously home from sea" is seen to be "Nobly preoccupied with his marriage licence".

In "Japanese River Tales" (R, p. 8) snow is imagined as a village lass, "touching/At her hair, at her raiment", "naked under/Her light robe, jewels/In her hair, in her ears", hurriedly coming to her husband, the river. And

The lithe river rejoices all morning
In his juicy bride—the snow princess
Who peeped from clouds, and chose him, and descended.

But in "Low Water" (R, p. 60), the river is imagined to be a voluptuous "beautiful idle woman", "tipsy and bored", lolling, "And a long thigh /Lifts from the flash of her silks." Again in "Fairy Flood", (R, p. 70) the river in flood is an "Escaping daughter/Her whole glass castle melting about her/In full magic. . .". And

As she brings down earth and sky blamelessly
In this headlong elopement without finery,
Weeps past—a freed out-heaping
Of accusative love and abandon.

But the "fatherly landscape" around the river does not like her daughter's elopement and so he "upbraids and harangues,/Claws weakly at her swollen decision".

River predominates with poems about salmon. The ecologically significant role of the river is best illustrated through its function as a habitat for the fulfilment of life-cycle of the salmon population. Salmon are born in fresh water. After three or four years they migrate to the sea. After one or two winters at sea the salmon come back to the rivers to spawn in nests or redds dug by them in the river gravel. It has been observed that the salmon return to reproduce at the exact spot where they were born. "Each fish is programmed to return to the river, to the tributary, and even to the very pool, perhaps the very gravel patch, of its birth," says Hughes.¹⁸ But after spawning is over, each male salmon and some females die at that very spot. It seems that at the end of their journey of life they have reached the destination. Now they will reproduce, replenish the earth with baby salmon and then die. "This is the real Samadhi", the ultimate bliss, that the sea-trout experience in "Strangers" (R, p.40-41).

In a Note to "Salmon-taking Times", Hughes says that the mature salmon begin to come back from the sea around February and the spawning begins in November, but may continue till January. But as the fish enter the river, they stop feeding and prepare themselves for spawning. On the other hand, the eggs develop by "cannibalizing the body-fat and muscle of the parent".¹⁹ Consequently, the fish begin to dwindle, and lie still in order to save energy till spawning starts. Their physical appearance changes, their jaws change and look grotesque. They suffer all these transformations, it may be surmised, because they pass on all

their energy, beauty and strength to their progeny and even give up their lives for them. They accept death willingly. "An August Salmon" (R, p. 43-44) describes such a fish as "bridegroom" or a "god, on earth for the first time,/With the clock of love and death in his body." With his body "nearly unrecognizable", he "sinks to the bed/Of his wedding cell, the coma waiting/For execution and death/In the skirts of his bride". In "September Salmon" (R, p. 66) the marriage and death image are repeated. His spawning and embracing death are presented as his service to "his descendents". By his patient performance "He is becoming a god,/A tree of sexual death, sacred with lichens." At particular times

You can see the floor of his chapel,
There he sways at the altar—
A soul
Hovering in the incantation and the incense.

In "October Salmon" (R, p. 72-74), again, the poet observes a fish, after "his two thousand miles" in the sea, resting "In his graveyard pool." His short-lived youthful sea-roving power, "sea-going Aurora Borealis", has come to an end. So the river is "reclaiming his sea-metals". Death has already marked him out "Mapping the completion of his service". There is a contrast between his glorious past and the present "death-in-life". He was once

the king of infinite liberty
In the flashing expanse, the bloom of sea-life,

On the surge-ride of energy, weightless,
Body simply the armature of energy
In that earliest sea-freedom, the savage amazement of life,
The salt mouthful of actual existence
With strength like light—

But the salmon has to come back, obeying "what was inscribed in his egg", to the river, his home—"He was probably hatched in this very pool". But even in this "chamber of horrors""under the mill-wall, with bicycle wheels, car-tyres, bottles", he has maintained

The epic poise
That holds him so steady in his wounds, so loyal to his doom, so patient
In the machinery of heaven.

In the last poem "Salmon Eggs" (R, pp. 77-79) religious and scientific images are blended in a happy marriage to describe the spawning of the salmon and the nourishing activities of the river. The river's continuous flow and sustaining of life bring in the images of "crypts", "altar", "liturgy", "Sanctus Sanctus", "perpetual mass", "the font, brimming with touch and whisper/Swaddling the egg." At the same time the flow of the water seems to be "the swollen vent/Of the nameless/Teeming

inside atoms and inside the haze/And inside the sun and inside the earth" (R, p. 78). The description recalls the lines of "Salmon-taking Times": "It is like a religious moment, slightly dazing./It is like a shower of petals of eglantine" (R, p. 22). Although the salmon "Emptying themselves for each other" "curve away deathwards", the moment is more than mere death and birth, it is a moment of the convergence of death and birth:

Something else is going on in the river

More vital than death – death here seems a superficiality
Of small scaly limbs, parasitical. More grave than life
Whose reflex jaws and famished crystals
Seem incidental

To this telling – these toilings of plasm—

These "toilings of plasm" do not exclude death – the salmon would die after spawning; however, this death is for the creation of new life. The religious imagery suggests this holy significance, this mystery. The river utters this mystery, this "liturgy", this "perpetual mass" for those who can listen to water:

Only birth matters

Say the river's whorls.

And the river
Silences everything in a leaf-mouldering hush
Where sun rolls bare, and earth rolls,

And mind condenses on old haws. (R, p. 79)

Although this concluding poem of *River* is entitled "Salmon Eggs", the central role occupied by the river cannot be missed. The river is the "font, brimming with touch and whisper/Swaddling the egg." The egg cannot survive without the sustaining power, protection and care of the ecosystem of the river. Therefore, the final implication of the poem as well as the whole volume of poetry is that the health of the overall ecosphere is critical for the cycle of birth, growth, death and rebirth of human and non-human species alike.

Wolfwatching

Wolfwatching (1989) opens with a poem alluding to the energy emanating from the sun ("The sun's cooled carbon wing")—as in *River*—and passing into a sparrow hawk sharpening its eyebeam. The idea is reiterated by describing its eyes as "Still wired direct/To the nuclear core". This solar power has made the tiny bird a "warrior" "Among the oaks of the harp". The interesting metaphor "oaks of the harp" perhaps suggests that the song or harp of the tiny bird is as powerful as the oaks. Perhaps it expresses a hope that the bird will survive the ecological crisis with

its inherent strength derived from the sun. The same power is identified in the madman's "tuneless yodel" in "Climbing into Hepstonstall" (*WW*, pp. 5-7): "'This is what made the wild harebell/So beautifully witless. /The trout under the stone so light-hearted!'" However, before that the madman gives a call for renewal of the polluted locale: "Let the seas recycle their atoms." His call is not only for washing the "black walls" of Hebden's mills or the Calder's chemical pollutants but a purification of the polluted soul:

So spring-clean the skull. Sweep from the soul's attic
Spinners, weavers, tacklers, dyers, and their infants.
All agitators of wool and cotton
Caught in the warp and the woof. (*WW*, P. 5)

In the title poem "Wolfwatching" (*WW*, pp. 12-15) the narrator does not present his observations of wolves in their natural habitats, but in the Kensington zoo in London. It empathetically portrays the pain, boredom and weariness of two wolves—an old and another young one. The weary old wolf cannot "settle" and is "reorganizing his position all day". Children's curiosities have reduced him to a "play-wolf". His power is now merely a "jumble of leftover scraps and bits of energy" /And bitten-off impulses and dismantled intuitions."

The young wolf, on the other hand, still has his Asiatic eyes "Aligned effortless in the beam of his power". For him the crowd of people and "the roller-coaster/Roar of London surrounding" are fleeting and he "can afford/To prick his ears to all that and find nothing/As to forest". And yet getting uprooted from the forest environment is always telling upon his nervous system and his boredom is inevitably leading to hallucination and a "nervous breakdown":

Is he hearing the deer? Is he listening
To gossip of non-existent forest?....
He's run a long way
Now to find nothing and be patient.
Patience is suffocating in all those folds
Of deep fur. (*WW*, p.14)

So both the wolves are suffering: the old one has already adjusted to the new life of confinement, loss of beauty and vitality. But the other still dreams of "escape and freedom" and fantasizes that he is a wolf "Dropped perfect on pebbles." But in reality he does not know how to use "his feet, / The power-tools." Thus the poem, above all, demonstrates the effects on the nonhuman species of the loss of their natural habitat.

From the ecological point of view, of course, "The Black Rhino" is the most important poem in this volume. This poem was written, as Hughes informs in his Note to it, to help raise funds for the campaign to save the Black Rhinoceros.² It is now an endangered species and

in fact on 10 November 2011 the BBC reported that the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) declared that the wild Black Rhino in Western Africa had become extinct. The WWF website informs that the European colonizers in the early twentieth century hunted down the rhinos relentlessly for food as well as for fun. They regarded the rhinos as vermin to be exterminated for the sake of their farms and plantations. This senseless killing led to the decline of the number of the black rhinos, and their disappearance, or near disappearance, from many countries by the end of the 1960s. The spurt of illegal poaching that started in the early 1970s effectively put the black rhinos outside conservation areas on the brink of extinction.²¹ The reasons behind the poaching and the illegal trade are that, as Hughes says, from earliest times in India and other East Asian countries, and in the Middle East, the rhino and its horn are believed to have magical and medicinal properties that can cure diseases like convulsions, nose-bleeding, fever and so on. It is also valued in traditional Chinese medicine. It is considered to be an aphrodisiac, helping in increasing male sexual prowess and fertility. The price of the rhino horn is said to be more than that of gold. In North Yemen there is a mass market for this horn which is used to make ornately curved handles for costly ceremonial daggers called djambia. Poverty and political violence are also responsible for poaching and illegal and unsustainable trade in rhino horn, as it is often exchanged for money and modern weapons.²²

The English writer and Hughes's friend Martin Booth went to the South Luangwa Park in Zambia in 1986 as a preparation for making a film about the Black Rhino. There were then more than thirty black rhinos. But next year when he went there with his film crew, he could not find a single Black Rhino. During this time in 1987 Hughes wrote this poem, too. The poem has three parts. The first part is an observation of the Black Rhino through the lens of a video camera. The film director's orders are mimicked in some of the lines of the poem: "Quick, now, the light is perfect for colour", "Video the busy thirst of his hair-fringed ears drinking safety from the burnt air", "Get a shot of his cocked tail", "Zoom in on the lava peephole where prehistory peers from the roots of his horn", and finally, "Get a close-up of his horn". But amid all this the threat to the animal is suggested brilliantly:

Quickly, quick, or even as you stare
 ■e will have dissolved
 Into a gagging stench, in the shimmer.

Bones will come out on the negative.

The second part is a dialogue between a man who fell asleep while reading a book and the dead Black Rhino. The man puts the blame for the extermination of the Black Rhino on the Rhino himself ("You stand

accused/And convicted"). The Rhino is like the legendary animal unicorn—a symbol of purity and grace—whose horn was also believed to have magical healing properties: drinking from the unicorn's horn was believed to protect the drinker from poison and epilepsy. Robert Graves in *The White Goddess* suggests that the fabulous beast unicorn was originally the rhinoceros, and because of the difficulty of obtaining the horn of the rhinoceros, in Pliny's Rome the horns of the oryx, and in Britain the narwhal horn, were fraudulently supplied by traders as unicorn's horn. In medieval tales it was described that a chaste virgin would come to its territory alone and the unicorn would lay its head in her lap and fall asleep; and only then the unicorn could be captured. The unicorn captured by a virgin and its subsequent death is often regarded as an allegorical representation of the Incarnation and the Passion of Christ.²³ In this poem the expression "God's other Child" may ironically refer to a sort of Christ figure who heals, not with divine grace but with "earthlier stuff" and that is why it is to be "sacrificed" like Christ. The Black Rhino is as if worshipped by the Eastern people afflicted by physical ailments. Their worship takes the form of partaking of the Rhino's horn and meat believed to cure their ailments. So "every grain" of the Rhino's body can be compared to an "anodyne"—a medicine that can assuage pain—and "Eucharist"—a parody of the Christian sacrament in which bread and wine are consecrated and consumed in the belief of winning divine grace. The satire is biting here as medical experts have dismissed the belief regarding the Rhino's horn possessing the power to cure diseases or to increase sexual potency. And those who kill the rhino for its meat do not do so for any religious fervour. So their eating the Rhino meat is nothing but a parody of the Eucharist.

On the other hand the Yemenite youths are eager to spend any amount of money to collect the long horns of the Black Rhino to use it as handles of their ceremonial daggers with beautiful carvings and adornment on them. So the length of the horn has bound it with "Eden's coffin/Tree" inextricably and, therefore, it must die. This image is probably a comical representation of the Cross and the suggestion is strengthened by the word "nailed". So with all the supposed healing and restorative power ("Your relics will heal/And restore all") and the strength and beauty of the horn, the Black Rhino, according to the dreamer, is responsible for its own extermination—"You are to blame".

But the dead Rhino lying in a pool of dried up blood refuted the accusation, alleging man's lack of the knowledge of right or wrong, and crying shame on man. The Rhino then mounted a counterattack—"You are the crime." His misfortune is that he has to exist in only the "dream" and "lethal whim" of man and what he truly is has remained unknown forever.

The third part of the poem is an elegy for the disappearing Black Rhino: "The Black Rhino is vanishing." As she is infected with man's "delusions" and "phantasmagoria", she "has become a delusion". The poet refers to the "night-bazaars" of Japan and Indo-China, the Yemenite youths gripping the hilts of daggers made of the rhino horns, money being counted in Dubai presumably to purchase the rhino horns, the sale of rhino horns in black markets of weapons like Kalashnikovs to be used in the inter-tribal Swahili civil war, and also poverty forcing the sale of rhino horns as cheaply as for only twenty-five pounds that can feed a family in Africa for ten weeks. These hard and unsettling facts are interspersed with the repetitive and plaintive lament, "The Black Rhino is vanishing", "she is vanishing", "The Black Rhino / Is vanishing". Thus the poem strives to become a plea for the protection of the Black Rhino, and an effective intervention for the movement for the conservation of the biodiversity of the world.

Ted Hughes in his radio interview with Nigel Forde says that he believes that writing such "semi-protest pieces of verse" about green issues cannot be very successful as poetry: "I don't think it works. It may work as propaganda for a little bit for some people, for some readers, but I don't think it can ever be the real thing." However, this comment may not be appropriate for "The Black Rhino", for the poem in its carefully constructed structure, its dazzling metaphors and images, its subtle irony and satire, and measured use of chilling facts about the senseless wheeling and dealing of the Black Rhino, is an impressive achievement and shows his transformation from what Terry Gifford calls "a nature poet" to a "green poet".²⁴

Wulfwatching is not a poem-sequence; it is what Terry Gifford calls an "unthemed collection of poetry"²⁵: it contains poems about people close to him, particularly the members of his family, memories of the First World War, mistreatment of miners as well as landscape and environment of his childhood, birds, and animals. However, as Gifford points out, these diverse poems are not separate from each other. They are, as he suggests, all linked by the same concern for environmental justice. For the degradation of human subjects cannot be separated from the issue of the degradation of environmental health and biodiversity: human beings and human culture are also part of nature.²⁶ Both man-made wars and exploitations of natural resources lead to the destruction of human and non-human species. A deep sense of outrage and grief links all the poems and underlines our ecological responsibility and thus gives the entire volume of poems with diverse subject a unity.

CHAPTER NINE

BIRTHDAY LETTERS

"Your story. My story." (BL. p. 9).

Birthday Letters was published in 1998, just a few months before Ted Hughes died. It records Ted Hughes's memories of his relationship with Sylvia Plath from its beginning in 1956 till her death in early 1963 and his attempts to cope with its aftermath. Before the publication of *Birthday Letters*, Hughes has written about Sylvia Plath in essays on and introductions to her literary works, generally in an impersonal, detached, somewhat guarded tone¹. But the "direct letter" form of the poems—as he informs to Seamus Heaney²—in this volume betrays an unusual intensity of personal loss, pain and laceration. Indeed, Hughes wrote in a letter to his son Nicholas that he had "never dreamed of publishing" most of these rather private and "simple little attempts to communicate with her".³ Moreover, he also thought that the poems were "so raw, so vulnerable, so unprocessed, so naïve, so self-exposing & unguarded", and wrote to Keith Sagar: "God knows what sort of book it is, but at least none of it is faked, innocent as it is."⁴ However, the publication lifted a heavy weight from off his chest and he had an inner sense of liberation, "of being released from it", and got back "a freedom of imagination".⁵

Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath met in Cambridge in February 1956 and married on 16 June in that year. They spent six years of a very happy married life, collaborating with each other in their creative life. But in early 1962 marital discord threatened to break up the marriage. They began to live separately. On 11 February 1963 Sylvia Plath committed suicide. Ted Hughes had been frequently blamed and held responsible for the death/"murder" of Sylvia Plath by a section of the feminists and Plath biographers. But Ted Hughes steadfastly refused to be drawn in this controversy and to publicly present his side of the story. However, he occasionally composed poems on this event, and when perhaps he realized his days were numbered, selecting 88 of these poems addressed to his former wife, published these as *Birthday Letters*.

In *Birthday Letters* Ted Hughes seems to have converged autobiography and art: the poems are concerned with their brief but passionate dating, marriage, honeymoon in Spain, their early struggling but happy conjugal life in London, their journey through America, her unconscious fears,

occasional bouts of depression and violent swings of mood, and his role as "midwife" for the birth of Sylvia Plath's real poetic voice and her true self, Sylvia's suicide, and his life, with two children, after her death. But these biographical facts have been transmuted into constituents of a sort of myth or a tragic drama by focusing on the childhood and adolescent traumatic experiences of Sylvia Plath, the role played by Fate in their relationship, an invisible deterministic entity at work in the universe, occult power of curses and omens; his naiveté, helplessness as well as his role as Plath's partner and guide—"midwife"—in her poetic quest; and her continued invisible presence in his life even after her death. Notwithstanding his powerful, subtle, direct language, the texture of the book has attained density and solidity through Hughes's employment of characters, analogy and imagery from *The Tempest*, "The Ancient Mariner", *Wuthering Heights*, allusions to Sylvia Plath's poems as comments on their contextual and thematic significances for his own life and work, the myth of the Minotaur, of Orpheus, of Isis, of Lilith, the folktale and legends like the 49th chamber of the Bluebeard, the rituals of Ouija and of suttee—the Hindu practice of the wife burning herself on the husband's funeral pyre as a supreme act of fidelity and sacrifice in the hope and joy of going to have a rebirth and a new and eternal life in the other world, to be reunited and keep company with her beloved. This rich tapestry of images, allusions and intertextuality make *Birthday Letters* not just an attempt of autobiographical self-justification—as some reviewers have slyly suggested⁶—but a really moving work of art.

The poems are arranged in an apparently chronological order, tracing the unfolding of the whole gamut of their relationship. The opening group of poems deal with their first acquaintance and the passionate, if fateful, attraction to each other. Then there are poems about their marriage and their honeymoon in Spain. After their return to England, the young and inexperienced couple's tentative life together in London and Yorkshire at Hughes's parents' home is dealt with in a few poems. In mid-1957 they went to America and stayed there for about two years, undertook together a cross-country camping tour in the summer of 1959 and spent two months at Yaddo, a writer's colony, but subsequently came back to England to make their home there. Another group of poems treat these experiences. A large number of poems recount the experiences of mutual love and tenderness, a practical working relationship of the two struggling young poets, occasional perceptions of social and cultural differences between the two citizens or products of two cultural milieus, and Hughes's sudden, fleeting apprehensions of the deep, unconscious psychological longing and terror concerning Sylvia Plath's fixation with her dead father. One of the poems, "Dreamers", deals with his love for Assia Wevill. The last group of poems explore their existence after separation, Plath's suicide and its aftermath.

The opening poem "Fulbright Scholars" records the moment when Hughes perhaps had the first glimpse of his future wife in a photograph of that year's intake of Fulbright scholars—Sylvia Plath had been awarded a Fulbright grant to study at Cambridge University in England in 1955. He might have noticed her exaggerated American grin, particularly her blond, long, wavy hair, like those of the then popular film star Veronica Lake. But he did not take in "what it hid". This carries a hint that behind Sylvia's *joi de vivre*, she hid an ominously black self, and he would be subjected to its whims. The thought flashed in his mind, and then he forgot it, but not the photograph. Then, as he remembers, he bought a peach from a stall: but still he wonders: "Was it then I bought a peach?" However, he remembers that "It was the first peach I had ever tasted./ I could hardly believe how delicious". The tone and syntax of the line "Was it then I bought a peach?" suggests that in retrospect he feels that the tasting of the peach was perhaps equivalent to a kind of the eating of the forbidden fruit. The glance at the photograph of the Fulbright scholars was the beginning of infinite joy along with infinite sorrow and grief and pain. Before the tasting of the peach, he at twenty-five was ignorant "of the simplest things". The experience of the eating of the peach initiated his loss of innocence, his fall into the world of pain and blood. Seeing the photograph and the eating of the peach are juxtaposed, as if the convergence of the two events had an occult meaning, although he was unaware of any occult significance at that moment. He might have eaten the peach at some other time—"Was it then I bought a peach?", he was not sure—but in view of his subsequent experiences, his life together with Sylvia Plath, he prefers—"That's as I remember"—to link the eating of the peach for the first time in his life with his glance at the photograph of the Fulbright scholars, maybe, with Sylvia Plath among them.

This persistence of the occult in their relationship is mentioned in more than one poem. For instance, in "Visit" (BL, pp.7-9), he narrates a ludicrous incident; he did not yet know Sylvia, nor did she know him. After midnight he along with a friend was throwing soil-clods to a window at Cambridge supposing it belonged to Sylvia. His girl-friend detested Sylvia. So what was he doing there, "watched and judged/Only by starry darkness and a shadow"? Many years later he realized that

I was being auditioned
For the male lead in your drama,
Miming through the first easy movements
As if with eyes closed, feeling for the role.
As if a puppet were being tried on its strings. (BL, p. 7)

Thus a prank by a just-pass-out university graduate proved to be ominous, prophetic—a cosmic force was selecting him for acting as the male protagonist in a drama involving Sylvia, her German-origin father

Otto Plath and Ted Hughes himself, as several poems of *Birthday Letters* indicate. It will remind the readers of the classic situation in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* involving Miranda, her very strict magician father Prospero, and Prince Ferdinand. Similarly, in "St Botolph's" (*BL*, p.14-15), in a party to launch their broadsheet, Hughes's friend Lucas invited Sylvia Plath; when Hughes met her suddenly, he felt

That day the solar system married us
Whether we knew it or not.

That first sight, first snapshot became inerasable from their memories; Sylvia Plath has made the event memorable both in her Journals and in her letters to her mother and brother.⁷ Hughes's memory, too, is so vivid that he almost presents a blazon of Sylvia in this poem: her legs, hand, "long, balletic, monkey-elegant fingers", the face—"a tight ball of joy",—her hair—"that floppy curtain", "the African-lipped, laughing, thickly/Crimson-painted mouth", and the eyes—"a crush of diamonds,/ Incredibly bright, bright as a crush of tears/That might have been tears of joy, a squeeze of joy":

I see you there, clearer, more real
Than in any of the years in its shadow –

He carried her blue headscarf in his pocket and her tooth-marks on his face. But the event was not without a hint of the ominous: her "floppy curtain" of hair hid the "scar" on her face; obviously it was a scar caused by her first attempt to commit suicide on August 24, 1953, a mark of her mental trouble, of the bout of depression she often suffered from, because of her father's death in 1940 when she was only eight years old.⁸ The fateful nature of that day for him has also been suggested by several references to astrological terms and images in the first part of the poem. Chaucer has been mentioned thrice within the first 25 lines, as Chaucer was believed to have a vast knowledge of astrology⁹: seeing the conjunction of the various planets the speaker Hughes believed that "our Chaucer... would have sighed". But Hughes, unlike Chaucer,

left it
For serious astrologers to worry
• That conjunction, conjunct my Sun, conjunct
With your natal ruling Mars. (*BL*, p. 14)

Hughes ignored the signs at his own cost. In the next poem "The shot", he mentions how he was hit by the trajectory of her Alpha career. He of course realized that her real target was someone else — her father who died leaving her feeling deserted at the age of eight:

Till your real target
Hid behind me. Your Daddy,
The god with the smoking gun. For a long time

Vague as a mist, I did not even know
 I had been hit,
 Or that you had gone clean through me—
 To bury yourself at last in the heart of the god. (BL, p. 16)

His only regret is that if he had identified the psychological obsession of Sylvia Plath like "the right witchdoctor", he could have saved her; freed from her obsession, her father-fixation—"godless, happy, quieted"—she might not have to die prematurely. But Hughes says: "I managed /A wisp of your hair, your ring, your watch, your nightgown." These last two lines of the poem reveal great pathos, pain, a sense of personal failure as well as his helplessness.

In "18 Rugby Street" Hughes again speaks of the tricks played by Fate; he was 'bribing Fate' to produce Sylvia at his flat at 18 Rugby Street, although he had no idea "what emergency surgery Fate would make/Of my casual self-service". The scar on her face—the physical sign of her attempted suicide in 1953—like a "sober star" warned him to "stay clear" of her. However, to his own misfortune he ignored the warning; like Miranda in *The Tempest* he was wondering at his discovery of the brave new world: "You were a new world. My new world./So this is America, I marvelled./Beautiful, beautiful America!" (BL, p.24)

Indeed, the characters in *The Tempest* have been employed in this volume as different functions in a system, and the characters in *Birthday Letters* are assigned these different functions differently on different occasions; for instance, in "18 Rugby Street" Hughes has the function of Miranda; in "Setebos" (BL, pp. 132-33) he assumes the function of Ferdinand, while the Miranda-function goes to Sylvia and to her mother is assigned the Prospero-function:

Who could play Miranda?
 Only you. Ferdinand — only me.
 And it was like that, yes, it was like that.
 I never questioned. Your mother
 Played Prospero, flying her magic in
 To stage the Masque, and bless the marriage,... (BL, p. 132)

Her mother's role as Prospero is also alluded to in "A Pink Wool Knitted Dress" (BL, p. 34): it was Mrs Plath who gave Sylvia her dress for her marriage. She expected Ted to be like Prince Ferdinand; seeing him rather shabbily dressed in his old cord jacket and old drab tie she hoped him to be at least the Frog-Prince of the fairy tale who would soon transform himself into a beautiful prince. Although Hughes presents himself with ironic understatement ("post-war, utility son-in-law", "Not quite the Frog-Prince", "Swineherd"), he was no less overwhelmed by the solemn occasion: "I stood subjected/To a strange tense: the spell-bound future." However, to him Sylvia Plath appeared to be a completely new woman:

You were transfigured.

So slender and new and naked,
A nodding spray of wet lilac.
You shook, you sobbed with joy, you were ocean depth
Brimming with God.
You said you saw the heavens open
And show riches, ready to drop upon us. (BL, p. 35)

However, it is rather obvious that there is a transtextual strategy at work even in this beautiful romantic passage. The lines "You were ocean depth / Brimming with God" echo Sylvia Plath's autobiographical essay "Ocean 1212-W" and her obsession with her seaside childhood at Winthrop where she had been till she was nine. She says at the end of that text that after her father's death when they moved inland, her childhood remained sealed off "like a ship in a bottle—beautiful, inaccessible, obsolete, a fine, white flying myth."¹⁰ Her suggestion is that her father had remained buried below the sea like a god, like the Colossus. So her ocean-depth occupied by the 'God' will come to be inseparably associated with her father. Moreover, the lines "You said you saw the heavens open/ And show riches, ready to drop upon us" echo the words of Caliban in *The Tempest*, (III.ii.139-40). Caliban thought the clouds would open and show riches only in his dream, and waking up he would cry to dream again. Is there an ominous hint that Sylvia waking up from her gloriously happy dream would cry for this heavenly music and riches?

The memories of their honeymoon in Spain are recalled with a blend of quiet joy and deep anguish. He felt Sylvia was not at all at home in Spain, as he was. She did not know the language, the history and Moorish culture of Spain: "Your schooling had somehow neglected Spain./The wrought-iron grille, death and the Arab drum." She did not enjoy the bull-fight, nor could she be enthusiastic about the paintings of Bosch and Goya:

Bosch

Held out a spidery hand and you took it
Timidly, a bobby-sox American.
You saw right down to the Goya funeral grin
And recognized it, and recoiled
As your poems winced into chill, as your panic
Clutched back towards college America.

("You Hated Spain". BL, p. 39)

However, Hughes vividly remembers the young wife full of hope and self-belief in the happy possibilities of her future poetic career:

I see you, in moonlight,
Walking the empty wharf at Alicante
Like a soul waiting for the ferry,
A new soul, still not understanding,
Thinking it is still your honeymoon

In the happy world, with your whole life waiting,
Happy, and all your poems still to be found.

("You Hated Spain", *BL*, p. 39)

In the following poem "Moonwalk", Hughes became painfully aware of the inevitable incomprehension that always lies between two persons, however close they apparently seem to be. He walked beside her in the glaring but cold moonlight, but could not understand her sudden cold and terrified mood-swing, as if she wore a "mask/Bleak as cut iron, a shell-half—/Shucked off the moon." The moon becomes an emblem of indifference, of deathlike coldness, aloofness, apathy, barrenness and lack of passion. Suddenly their relationship had become overshadowed by some evil agency:

Alarming
And angering moon-devil—here somewhere.
The Ancient Mariner's Death-in-Life woman
Straight off the sea's fevered incandescence
Throwing black-and-white dice. (*BL*, p. 41)

So even during this honeymoon trip a distance and uncomprehending inaccessibility marked their days:

I could no more join you
Than on the sacrificial slab
That you were looking for. I could not
Even imagine the priest. I walked beside you
As if seeing you for the first time — (*BL*, p. 42)

But Hughes believed he needed "patience", he should not "wake a sleepwalker": "One day, I thought, /I shall understand this tomb-Egyptian, /This talking in tongues to a moon-mushroom." (*BL*, p. 41)

The portrait of a small sleepy—"that still slept/In the Middle Ages"—market-place that Sylvia Plath drew during their honeymoon in Spain occasioned the poem "Drawing". The poet fondly remembers the morning when Plath doggedly and patiently drew the picture, keeping the drawing pad on her long legs, while he was sitting near her, "scribbling something". Years later that sleepy, almost medieval, market-place has now "disappeared/Under the screams of a million summer migrants/And the cliff of dazzling hotels", just as Plath's hand "Went under Heptonstall to be held/By endless darkness." But the portrait and the memory of Plath in her holiday outfit—"red, white-spotted bandana", shorts and short-sleeved jumper—and her "concentrated quiet" have survived. Although his pen now moves on only two hundred miles from her hand under the graveyard at Heptonstall, he is aware that the distance between them is unbridgeable:

In this contemplative calm
Now I drink from your stillness that neither
Of us can disturb or escape. (*BL*, p. 45)

Shortly after their hone ymoon and a visit to Yorkshire, the young couple found their first home at 55 Eltisley Avenue. It was a small flat ("55 Eltisley", *BL*, p. 49-50) with grease-grimed shelves and dark walls, vacated by a widow after her husband's death. While the shabby flat induced Sylvia Plath to start a flurry of scouring, Hughes looked for omens and found the last bloodstain of the widow's husband on the pillow. Before moving in their things, Hughes slept in their first home alone. He could not but be affected by "That crypt of old griefs and its stale gas/Of a dead husband." It seemed to him to be a very inauspicious "ritual launching/Of our expedition". And as if to confirm his suspicion, he felt that their relationship was already marred by a sense of possessiveness and a "delirium of suspicion" on the part of Sylvia and an attitude of timid compromise on his part to maintain conjugal peace: "I had accepted/The meteorological phenomena /That kept your compass steady." He felt that she formed an idea of England as "part/Nursing home, part morgue/For something partly dying, partly dead"; and if she was happy, the source of her happiness was her existence within a Bell Jar, her preoccupation with the childhood memory, "Your New England Christmas,/A Mummy and a Daddy, still together/Under the whirling snow, and our future." However, these lines reveal a sense of resentment on the part of Hughes for Sylvia's still-surviving attachment to her parents. If it was unreasonable for Sylvia to resent any possible mention of Hughes's "might-have-beens", it was equally illogical for Hughes to expect Sylvia to completely sever her psychological bond with her parents just because of her marriage to Hughes. That is, Hughes also suffered from a hidden jealousy. That is why he wrote: "Already / We were beyond the Albatros"; if the Albatros in Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" was the symbol of redemption, Hughes and Sylvia had already lost that opportunity.

These small misunderstandings, suspicions, undercurrents of resentments gradually converged to widen the rift between Hughes and Plath. If they had been able to overcome these ordeals by some stroke of luck, their life together would have been happy and fruitful. In "Flounders" (*BL*, p. 65-66) Hughes narrates a fishing adventure with Plath in mid-channel off Chatham when they were being dragged towards the sea by a strong wind and the powerful tide. They rowed desperately back towards the shore but soon realized that they "weren't going to make it" and "wondered what next". But they were rescued by "a power-boat and a pilot of no problems". Having been out of danger they began to fish and from within water six or seven feet from the land they pulled up big flounders; suddenly the sea filled their boat with its surplus. If they had met such "a power-boat and a pilot of no problem", this adventure, says Hughes, might have been 'a toy miniature/Of the life that might have bonded us/Into a single

animal, a single soul". Their domestic life would have been full of happiness. Instead, both of them were being guided by a different kind of pilot: poetry. The beautiful sister of poetry, like the Ouija spirit, came to warn them that if they obeyed poetry, she would ruin their happiness, and make them pay for their fame: however,

Poetry listened, maybe, but we heard nothing
And poetry did not tell us. And we
Did what poetry told us to do. (*BL*, p. 66)

Hughes, with his keen power of observation, could concentrate on external natural objects, animals, birds, fishing and hunting and apparently was not much encumbered with any inner turmoil. But Sylvia Plath was haunted by her traumatic childhood, memories of her suicide attempt, and her need to write about a mythical or alchemical process of the death of the old self and the birth or rebirth of a new self. Plath's psychoanalyst Dr Ruth Beuscher also counselled her to confront her childhood memories and traumas, to find "a way of ordering and reordering the chaos of experience."¹¹ After her marriage, Hughes also thought that that was the way she could find her true poetic voice, her true identity, and engaged her to invoke the spirit in sessions with the Ouija board, set her writing exercises and attempted to act as a spiritual midwife.¹² Indeed, Hughes refers to her 'analyst' in his poem "Child's Park": "You had instant access, your analyst told you,/To the core of your Inferno—/The pit of the hairy flower." The "hairy flower" alludes to the azalea flowers mentioned in Plath's poem "Electra on Azalea Path" (*CPSP*, pp. 116-17) in which she invokes her dead father buried near the Azalea Path in Winthrop Cemetery. Another image in the line "You breathed water" also alludes to Plath's poem "Full Fathom Five" in which she addresses her father: "Father, this thick air is murderous./I would breathe water." (*CPSP*, p. 93) Hughes thus prepares the ground for introducing the themes of Plath's quest for her father-God/Muse, the several stages of the alchemical process of the death of the old self and the rebirth of the new creative self ("Here was your stair—/Alchemy's seven colours," in "Child's Park") (*BL*, pp. 69-70) through the cumulative effects of all these images. Hughes describes the quest thus:

You imagined a veil-rending defloration
And a rebirth out of the sun— nixed up together
And somehow the same. You were fearless
To meet your Father,
His Word fulfilled, there, in the nuclear core.

What happens in the heart simply happens.

I stepped back. That glare
Flinging your old self off like underthings
Left your whole Eden radioactive. (*BL*, p. 70)

Hughes felt that their happy conjugal life ("Eden") was affected by the harmful radioactive effects of this unconscious poetic quest, this mysterious alchemical journey undertaken by Sylvia Plath, irreparably though silently. Neither Hughes nor Plath had any control over emotional or internal turmoil—over the unconscious processes of the psyche. They both blissfully remained ignorant of what damage the quest began to cause to their conjugal life.

In "9 Willow Street" (*BL*, pp. 71-74) Hughes again points to this fissure in their relationship; this poetical address with the number 9 suggesting the nine Muses was the small flat where they stayed for some time in 1958 after Sylvia Plath left her teaching assignment at Smith College. Hughes huddled in one room in his black sack engrossed in reading Jung's works; in the other room Plath was paralysed in some unknown terror, restlessly working on her new Harnes typewriter. Both were struggling artists, trying to find out their own voices. Hughes alludes to Sylvia Plath's fictional works through the images of her "Panic Bird" and the "Bell Jar" to hint to her psychic troubles. He confesses that he "hardly understood" her psychical problems. He speaks of "the reverberations of the turbines/Home and College had assembled in" her; he observed her "day/Was twenty-four rungs of a fire-escape/Hanging in ghastly swirls, over nothing,/Reaching up towards nothing./What an airy Hell!" Indeed, in *Letters Home* Plath had written of her struggle with the heavy load of teaching assignment at Smith College and consequently her inability to find time to concentrate on her own writing, apart from her psychoanalytical troubles with her dead father and her mother.¹³ The situation became further complicated with her identifying Ted Hughes as a surrogate-father.¹⁴ However, Hughes had no idea of what was troubling her. He compares the happenings at 9 Willow Street with "strokes of a hallucinating fever/In some heaving dimension of chemical horror." The metaphor of "stroke"—a bright light that flashes rapidly on and off used especially in discos—is quite appropriate, as it suggests a blinding effect, a blurring of reason and clarity. Another image for him also suggests the same confusion of understanding: "While I, like a poltergeist fog,/Hung on you, fed on you—heavy, drugged/With your nightmares and terrors." "Poltergeist" is a ghost that is compared to "fog", suggesting his lack of clarity for the situation and the consequent sense of guilt. Hughes tried to offer protection to her "folding black wings round" her; "black wings" may signify an occult as well as helpless, inadequate protection; happiness appeared only momentarily, like a tiny migrant bird oriole or a little humming-bird. It seemed that their whole quest was futile—"What a waste!"

With retrospective introspection Hughes feels that, under such

circumstances, they both would have survived if they had followed their own separate paths. As both of them remained engrossed in their own creative-artistic concerns, in their domestic life they failed to understand each other:

Alone

Either of us might have met with a life.
 Siamese-twinning, each of us festering
 A unique soul-sepsis for the other,
 Each of us was the stake
 Impaling the other. We struggled
 Quietly through the streets, affirming each other,
 Dream-maimed and dream-blind. (*BL*, p. 72)

Both praised each other, encouraged each other in their artistic efforts. However, their dreams and visions blinded them to their everyday needs and subsequently, perhaps, their artistic needs too. So they "sleepwalked into death". The recurrence of "dream", "dreamers", "sleepwalk" and other variants in several poems of *Birthday Letters* indicate the paralysis of willpower and subjection to unconscious psychic forces with the implication that both of them were being guided or impaled irresistibly by such forces.

The imagery of the Panic Bird and the bell jar ("glass dome") indicating the irrational suicidal drive imprisoned within Sylvia Plath reappears in the poem "The Bird" (*BL*, pp. 77-79). In "Visit" Hughes referred to Plath's "drama" in which he unconsciously played the male lead. In "The Bird" Hughes speaks of Plath's "fairy tale" of which he knew nothing then, but gradually came to realize later. Hughes reconstructs this Freudian "fairy tale"—the source myth of her poetry, so to say—in a number of poems in *Birthday Letters*.

Undoubtedly, Ted Hughes was a most perceptive reader of Sylvia Plath's poetry very early in her poetic career. Her *Letters Home* was published in 1975. After her death he had access to her journals as well as her letters. Her poems, journals and letters gave Hughes a clearer insight into Sylvia Plath's "fairy tale"—her poetic myth, the matrix of her imaginative creations. Her poems and journals suggest that her psychological turmoil started since the death of her father Otto Plath when she was only eight: she felt abandoned, betrayed, forever mourning, as if "married to a shadow" ("The Colossus", *CPSP*, p.129-30).¹⁵ But she managed to keep this mourning self to be hidden in a "lightless hibernaculum/Where bees, striped black and gold, sleep out the blizzard" ("Electra on Azalea Path", *CPSP*, 116-17). The metaphor "hibernaculum" is striking, as it means the place or rest in which an animal pass winter in a dormant, torpid or inactive state. The bees sleeping out the blizzard would suggest both her allusion to her father who was an entomologist and to her imaginative, creative powers remaining dormant till she came

to write her *Ariel* poems. Till that time she continued to maintain a facade of bright and smiling exterior for the sake of her loving mother who heroically struggled to make her two children never to miss the absent father. However, at the depth of her unconscious she severely resented her mother as she regarded her as her father's murderer and held her responsible for depriving her of a father's love and affection. Moreover, she also sensed that her mother did not approve of her promiscuity.¹⁶ But she could never consciously express any resentment against her mother for fear of showing herself ungrateful for all what she had done for her two children. Thus she began to live a double life—with two contrary selves: an optimistic, lively, energetic mask/persona securing straight As in the examinations, and another troubled, tortured inner self painfully labouring to come to terms with the trauma and void in her life left by the death of her father and resentment against her mother; the opposing pull of the two selves very often engendered a sense of crippling guilt, created a deadlock—a writer's block; she would repeatedly record her dissatisfactions and depression in her journals; only the sessions with her psychiatrist Dr Ruth Beuscher permitting her to "hate" her mother would help her overcome her Panic Bird, her writer's block.¹⁷ Her poem "Electra on Azalea Path" reveals this internal inferno comprising her sense of loss and Freudian fixation for her father and thinly-disguised irony, sarcasm and anger against her mother:

It was good for twenty years, that wintering—
As if you never existed, as if I came
God-fathered into the world from my mother's belly:
Her wide bed wore the stain of divinity....
Small as a doll in my dress of innocence
I lay dreaming your epic, image by image....

("Electra on Azalea Path", CPSP, 116-17)

The title of the poem, besides naming the path where her father is buried, also manages, as Anne Stevenson points out, to have "a sly echo of Aurelia Plath's name".¹⁸ But in the fourth stanza of the poem Plath, borrowing "the stilts of an old tragedy", alludes to Clytemnestra and accuses her mother of plotting and killing her father:

• *The day your slack sail drank my sister's breath
The flat sea purpled like that evil cloth
My mother unrolled at your last homecoming.
I borrow the stilts of an old tragedy.
The truth is, one late October, at my birth-cry
A scorpion stung its head, an ill-starred thing;
My mother dreamed you face down in the sea.*

By alluding to her own birthday (27 October) Plath here merges Aurelia Plath with Clytemnestra and gives vent to her repressed feelings of anger and hatred for her mother in poetry which might have a therapeutic

effect on her mental health. However, there was no trace of this bitter anger or accusation against her mother in her letters home to either her brother or her mother during the months preceding the time when the poem was composed in 1959. Outwardly she was her usual bright self. The opposing pull of these two split selves became unbearable when Sylvia Plath was about twenty-one when she attempted to commit suicide on 24 August 1953:

At twenty I tried to die
And get back, back, back to you.

I thought even the bones would do. ("Daddy", CPSP, pp. 222-24)

The repetition of "back" suggests the intensity of her desire to reclaim her father's memory. But this inability to accept the death of her father and the irrational longing to get back to him were causing problems to her normal life.

She recovered from her attempted suicide at McLean Hospital, the psychiatric wing of Massachusetts General Hospital and her electroconvulsive therapy (ECT) as well as psychotherapy under the care of her psychiatrist Dr Ruth Beuscher made it clear to her the root of her internal turmoil. She felt the need to accept her father's death as most people do—as her mother has done; however, she could not accept the reason of her father's death as the "gangrene" in one of his legs or even his mortality at all; she expresses her anguished disbelief and desperation in "Electra on Azalea Path":

It was the gangrene ate you to the bone,
My mother said; you died like any man.
How shall I age into that state of mind?
I am the ghost of an infamous suicide,
My own blue razor rusting in my throat.
O pardon the one who knocks for pardon at
Your gate, father — your hound-bitch, daughter, friend.

It was my love that did us both to death. (CPSP, p. 117)

Her psychological incestual love for her father and her desire to get back to him are expressed in many of her other poems; for instance, in "The Bee Keeper's Daughter" (CPSP, p. 118) in densely symbolic language she imagines her marriage with the "maestro of the bees", and there is no other woman to contest her absolute claim on him: "Here is queenship no mother can contest". In "The Colossus" (CPSP, pp. 129-30) she declares that for thirty years she has been labouring to put together the ruined limbs of her father, "Pieced, glued, and properly jointed" and "To dredge the silt from [his] throat" in the expectation of hearing something from him who considered himself "an oracle of some god or other", but with no success; she is now forced to conclude: "My hours are married to shadow". The same yearning for hearing something from her father is revealed in "Little Fugue" (CPSP, pp. 187-88):

Great silence of another order.
I was seven, I knew nothing.
The world occurred.
You had one leg, and a Prussian mind.

Now similar clouds
Are spreading their vacuous sheets.
Do you say nothing?
I am lame in the memory.

Her father migrated from Grabow, a Prussian town and one of his legs had to be amputated. So clearly there is a "point-blank, demythologized" allusion¹⁹ to her father here, as Hughes mentions. The second stanza of the poem has noted the "featurelessness" of the clouds; she is surrounded by the clouds which become in the last line of the poem "a marriage dress, of that pallor". However, there is no message of hope, liberation or wisdom from the father: "Do you say nothing?" Her urging meets with complete silence of another kind.

Most importantly, there is "Daddy" (CPSP, 222-24) in which Plath blends her melancholy for the loss of her father when she was "ten" with her murderous instinct, hatred and her intense desire to get back to him through her failed attempt to commit suicide "at twenty". In a ritualized exorcism she indiscriminately hurls all imaginable abuses at him: she associates him with Hitler's air-force and tank drivers ("Luftwaffe", "Panzer-man"), calls him a "Fascist", "a brute", "a devil" with the visible mark of a "cleft in your chin instead of your foot" and a "bastard". She claims to have symbolically "killed" the memory of him, to have ended her relationship with him ("Daddy, I have had to kill you"; "So daddy, I'm finally through"; "Daddy, daddy, you bastard, I'm through"). However, beneath all this aggressive bluster one cannot miss her intense urge to "recover" her daddy, to "get back, back, back" to him, and her unfathomable pain for her inability to communicate with him: "I never could talk to you./The tongue stuck in my jaw./It stuck in a barb wire snare." The tongue stuck in a "barb wire snare" is indeed a very violent image in this context. The repetition of the affectionate vocative "daddy" (seven times including the title but particularly in the lines in which she combines it with vilification and expletives) reveals a very complex attitude to her father: it appears she attempts to disguise her irresistible pull to her daddy ("I thought even the bones would do") with a torrent of revilement, expletives and even swear-words. And the crying need for her daddy's love defeats her apparent declaration of freedom. Has she indeed been able to free herself from the demon, from Johnny Panic?

The problem became further complicated after her meeting and marriage with Ted Hughes. She began to identify her father with her husband in his ability to offer protection as well as his perceived abandonment and betrayal of Sylvia Plath for another woman who is

also barren.²⁰ This perception is presented by Hughes in several poems in *Birthday Letters*. In "Black Coat" (*BL*, pp. 102-03) Hughes remembers once standing on the shore of the sea in his black coat. He was trying to be alone and forget the past, hoping to have "a whole new start". But Plath's overactive unconscious perception complicated this hope. As her father was actually buried at Winthrop cemetery near the sea, Plath imagined her dead father rising from the sea in his black coat and the ghost merging into the man in black—Ted Hughes—standing on the sea-shore.²¹ This double image was set up like a "decoy" to draw out her hidden traumatic psychological problems to be shot at so that she can get rid of her father-fixation. Hughes also suggests that there was a "paparazzo sniper" "nested" in her brown iris. It might appear that Hughes imputes that Plath was using him selfishly as a "decoy" to get rid of her father-fixation. However, Hughes also emphasizes the point that perhaps Plath, like him, had also no idea what damage this identification of her father and her husband was going to cause:

Perhaps you had no idea either....
 No idea
 How that double image,
 Your eye's inbuilt double exposure
 Which was the projection
 Of your two-way heart's diplopic error,
 The body of the ghost and me the blurred see-through
 Came into single focus.
 Sharp-edged, stark as a target,
 Set up like a decoy.... (*BL*, p. 103)

However, Hughes was unaware of this identification of Plath's father and himself in Plath's unconscious: "I did not feel/How, as your lenses tightened,/He slid into me." The poem obliquely alludes to two poems of Plath, "Man in Black" and "Daddy" (*CPSP*, pp. 119-20 and pp. 222-24 respectively). The former describes a man in black coat striding out of the sea; the latter reveals what she—when they saved Plath from her attempt to get back to her dead father through suicide—decided to do: "And then I knew what to do./I made a model of you,/A man in black with a Meinkampf look". But when this model failed to fill up the empty space left by her daddy in her psyche, she also showers vituperation on him: he was "the vampire who said he was you/And drank my blood for a year,/Seven years, if you want to know." Indeed, her identification of Hughes with Hitler appears to him as nothing but a decoy and a stark target.

"The Bee God" (*BL*, pp. 150-52) speaks of the speaker becoming a "target"—the word is repeated twice—of the bees that stung him ("planted their volts, their thudding electrodes in on their target"). The poem alludes to a mysterious "wedding" between a beekeeper, an "Abbess/In the nunnery of the bees" and "your Daddy" who was also

"the God of the Bees"—clearly alluding to Sylvia Plath and her father, an entomologist, a specialist on bees. Ironically, Ted Hughes himself brought the beehive, but these bees metamorphosed themselves into her poems: "Your page a dark swarm/Clinging under the lit blossom" and at the centre of it were "You and your Daddy". Neither did the speaker know that he had given Plath something that would act as the ingredients of her poetic myth. Her poems, particularly her last poems as well as those associated with her "Daddy", the "dark swarm" that she would nurture in the beehive—would not only take her away from Hughes's life but also hurt him immensely; in "Daddy" she compares him with vampire and Hitler. When she came out of her poetic trance, she wanted to save him—"You rushed to me, your dream-time veil off, / Your ghost-proof gloves off"—but she could not save him from the inevitable, inexorable fate, "From what had been decided". The bees were "Fanatics for their God", as unstoppable as "blind arrow", as unchangeable "as the fixed stars". So the speaker "was flung like headshot jackrabbit".

In "The Table" (*BL*, pp. 138-39) Hughes again narrates how unwittingly he caused Plath to immerse herself through her writing into the source myth of her poetry—the memory and worship of her father, which, however, took her away from him. He had bought a thick broad elm plank intending to gift Plath a solid writing table. With sweating effort he made "a perfect landing pad/For your inspiration." Initially "euphoric", Sylvia bending over the table like an ailing animal would search for the curative herb there. For Plath writing poetry was a therapeutic process. Hughes knew that a coffin made of a rough-cut elm plank "gives the dead/Protection for a slightly longer voyage". But he did not know that instead of making a writing table, he "had made and fitted a door/Opening downwards into [her] Daddy's grave." So soon the words that emerged from Sylvia Plath's pen on her writing table opened a door into the elm-coffin, invoked her father, and an incredulous Hughes saw her "Daddy resurrected". Her preoccupation with her father in her poetry created an impenetrable wall between Hughes and Plath—"While I slept he snuggled/Shivering between us"). His incomprehension of the whole situation is expressed through the paradox of waking up into "a deeper sleep" and the recurrent images of a sleepwalker and a blindfolded actor unable to read his script. The risen father took her away "Down through the elm door". Hughes then portrays the dislocation and emptiness of his life with a tone of deep melancholy:

I woke up on the empty stage with the props.
The paltry painted masks. And the script
Ripped up and scattered, its code scrambled,
Like the blades and slivers
Of a shattered mirror. (*BL*, p. 139)

Again in "Dream Life" (*BL*, pp. 141-42) Hughes speaks of her descent during sleep into her "father's grave", into "the temple-crypt, /That private, primal cave/Under the public dome of father-worship." Her sleep was "a bloody shrine" and her "father's gangrenous, cut-off leg" its "sacred relic", an allusion to her memory of Otto Plath's amputated leg. Continuing this religious imagery regarding Plath's preoccupation with her father's memory in her poetry Hughes wonders: "What was the liturgy/Of that nightly service, that cult/Where you were the priestess?" He further adds that her dreams consist of "a sea clogged with corpses,/Death-camp atrocities, mass amputations" which are recurrent images in Sylvia Plath's poetry. Perhaps her poems are her "salvaged fragments of" that nocturnal service. Here Hughes may have in his mind apart from Plath's poems like "The Colossus" and "Daddy", chiefly her later poems like "Little Fugue", "Elm", "Event", "Apprehensions" and "Berck-Plage" – all written in 1962, a few months before her death. "Little Fugue" (*CPSP*, pp.187-89) directly refers to her father's "one leg, and a Prussian mind" and addresses him: "Such a dark funnel, my father!/I see your voice/Black and leafy, as in my childhood." She identifies him with the "black tree", the yew, and characterizes it as "Gothic and barbarous, pure German." Her incomprehensible terrors are also revealed in her poem "Elm" (*CPSP*, pp. 192-93), particularly the image of the cry flapping out nightly reminding one of the Panic Bird:

I am inhabited by a cry.
Nightly it flaps out
Looking, with its hooks, for something to love.

I am terrified by this dark thing
That sleeps in me;
All day I feel its soft, feathery turnings, its malignity.

In Plath's poem "Apprehensions" (*CPSP*, pp. 195-96) she expresses her inner "terror/Of being wheeled off under crosses and a rain of pietas." She cries out: "Is there no way out of the mind?/There are no trees or birds in this world,/There is only a sourness." Her poetic imagination only moves inside her mental obsessions, inside her Bell Jar, her private myth. Her apprehension of a swiftly-approaching emptiness and doom is embodied in these lines: "On a black wall, unidentifiable birds/Swivel their heads and cry./There is no talk of immortality among these!" In his own poem "Apprehensions" (*BL*, p. 140) Hughes comments that the "favourite place" of her terror was her Schaeffer pen. Her writing would only contain her apprehensions that all her "wedding presents", "dreams", husband, children, typewriter, sewing-machine, her body, her life—all would be snatched away from her by the "terror's goblins". She could see this terror inside her pen. The poem ends: "Somebody took that

too." This short line suggests that she should have been allowed to write, although she would write only of her terrors.

Similarly "The Rabbit Catcher" (*BL*, pp. 144-46) is also a counter-commentary on Plath's poem "The Rabbit Catcher" (*CPSP*, pp. 193-94). Written on 21 May 1962 Plath's poem speaks of a sea-side narrow hollow place where snares were laid among the gorse and thickets to catch rabbits. The place evoked in her an extreme sensation of torture, of being gagged, blinded and exposed to the horrors of hell ("The wind gagging my mouth... /Tearing my voice, and the sea/Blinding me with its lights, the lives of the dead/Unreeling in it"). Even the apparent "great beauty" of the gorse with its sharp spiky leaves and yellow flowers struck her as "malignity", "torture" and "extreme unction"—the ceremony of blessing the sick or dying people. Then she identified her male companion with the rabbit catcher and guessed that he was excited by the prospect of the victims—the trapped rabbits. She thought the snares, "those little deaths", waited for him "like sweethearts". From this she went on to comment on their relationship which appeared to be like a trap of "tight wires" in which she was victimized like a rabbit. An overpowering "mind, like a ring" or a noose, was closing in on the vitality of her soul ("Sliding shut on some quick thing"). She concludes: "The constriction killing me also."

Hughes's poem with the same title indicates that it is only a record of his meditation on her poem. Contemplating on it, a baffled Hughes tried to remember its occasion: it all began with a "domestic drama", a misunderstanding between the couple over something which he could not recall: "How had it started? What/Had bared our edges? What...set us ...Bleeding each other?" They had been intending a day's outing to the sea beach. So a furious Plath started driving the car with the babies in it. Hughes, apprehending some crazy deeds by her, jumped into the car and after some time perceived "a simmering truce" on her face. It was a fresh day in May. Just below a gorse cliff on the coast they found an eyrie hollow where they sat and fed the babies. Plath raged against the English beaches and the sea like a "flat, draughty plate". Along the edge of the field they found a snare and immediately she "tore it up and threw it into the trees", even furiously dubbed those who set the snares "'murderers!'" Hughes was "aghast" and perceived the distinctions between their responses to this country custom. For him setting snares to catch rabbits is an attempt by poor country people to live off the land, to raise a penny to fill "a Sunday stewpot" out of local resources. It was a "sacred Ancient custom" and so to tear up the trapline is to desecrate its "sanctity", equivalent to uprooting the "precarious, precious saplings" of his "heritage". To Plath, however, it was nothing

but cruelty, murder of "baby-eyed Strangled innocents" She might lack veneration for his "country gods", an awareness of the sanctity of heritage or the significance of the country customs, but she also did not have any sympathy and understanding for the poor country people and their legitimate way of life. But was she flinging snares after snares into the wood for her compassion for the poor rabbits? Hughes says, "You were weeping with a rage/That cared nothing for rabbits." Hughes had no access into her rage, "could not . . . understand" her, as she was "locked into some chamber gasping for oxygen". Now he can only make some guesses:

In those snares
You'd caught something,
Had you caught something in me,
Nocturnal and unknown to me? Or was it
Your doomed self, your tortured, crying,
Suffocating self?

Sylvia Plath either suspected some hidden disloyalty, a streak of faithlessness or promiscuity in Hughes about which he was completely ignorant, or it was her perception of her persecution complex, her familiar sense of being abandoned by her father and husband and smothered by her mother's expectations of which she had jotted down so often in her Journals.²²

Whatever might be the sources of her rage, they produced those "terrible, hypersensitive" verses of her poems. What remains unsaid but implied is that these terrible verses perhaps based on some misunderstanding immensely hurt Hughes and he did not deserve this sort of demeaning portrayal in her poem.

Not only in her poetry but also in her fiction Sylvia Plath delineated her psychic turmoil and this also hurt her near and dear ones. In her short story entitled "The Fifty-ninth Bear"²³ Sadie was suggested to will her husband Norton to be killed by the bear. As he struggled to save himself from the bear, "he heard a shrill cry—of terror, or triumph, he could not tell. It was the last bear, her bear, the fifty-ninth." The short story was based on a real life event during their tour in 1959 through the Yellowstone, a huge national park in the US. One night a bear killed a young husband when he came out to shoo it away and then the bear came to ransack the car of Plath and Hughes. Hughes wanted to go out to shout away the bear but was prevented by Plath.²⁴ So, Hughes wonders in his poem "The 59th Bear" (*BL*, pp. 85-95), why Sylvia Plath transformed their "dud scenario" into the kind of ending that her story has. Was he the "doppelganger" (*BL*, p. 94) of the man killed, willed by the wife? Was the ending of her story a kind of cathartic outpouring of her inner murderous instinct? His poem ends thus:

At that time

I had not understood
How the death hurtling to and fro
Inside your head, had to alight somewhere
And again somewhere, and had to be kept moving,
And had to be rested
Temporarily somewhere. (BL, pp. 94-95)

Hughes implies that Sylvia Plath had a death wish within her and she had to aesthetically transform it occasionally in her fiction as well as poetry. In the short story her doppelganger Sadie directed the killing instinct towards the husband, resulting in his death. On other occasions she suicidally directed it towards her own person, resulting in, once her near-death, and once her actual death.

There was a temporary respite in this psychological battle and turmoil in Sylvia Plath when she became "fruitful—in getting pregnant, /In the oceanic submissions/Of giving birth" (BL, p.109), as described in "Remission". In "Isis" she is associated with "Magnae Deorum Matris"—the great mother of the gods (BL, p.112). Hughes discovers another self of Plath—"The inmost, smiling, solid one, the joy-being", and in "Remission" compares her with "Venus of Willendorf or the Wyf of Bath", and declares that "that was the you/You loved and wanted to live with."²⁵ Venus of Willendorf is a Paleolithic female statuette probably made between 24000 and 22000 BCE. It was discovered in 1908 at Willendorf, a village in Lower Austria but now kept in a museum in Vienna. Scholars have interpreted it as a fertility goddess because of the proportionately large size of the breasts and the abdomen and the detail of the vulva.²⁶ Chaucer's portrait of the Wife of Bath in *The Canterbury Tales* emphasizes her unabashed championing of the married life.²⁷ Hughes even invokes the image of an Earth Goddess, recalling "Crow's Undersong", in describing this other self of Plath:

That was the you you shared with the wild earth.
It was your membership
Of a sorority of petals and creatures
Whose masonic signs are beauty and nectar
In the love-land, the Paradise

. Your suicide had tried to drag you from. ("Remission", BL, p.109)

In "Isis", after "desperate days and weepings", Plath "had come to an agreement finally" with Death: "He could keep your Daddy and you could have a child". In "Remission" Hughes noticed the disguised death wearing a mask and resembling Sylvia. But in "Isis" the confident would-be mother Sylvia "had stripped the death-dress off,/Burned it on Daddy's grave." But Hughes was not sure whether Life had won the battle and Death was banished for ever during their journey around America: "Was Death, too, part of our baggage?/Unemployed for a

while, fellow traveller?" Perhaps Death met them unrecognized, on the road, in a cafe or at a gas station. Or perhaps he was hiding among Plath's papers, waiting for the opportune moment of her "habits/To come back and remember him". But at the moment she was like a tree with ripened fruit. She was accompanied with her Indian midwife, a "priestess of fruits." The engraving of the Black Isis hung on the wall of Sylvia Plath's home as if stepped off the wall and assumed the shape of the pregnant Plath:

The great goddess in person
Had put on your body, waxing full,
Using your strainings
Like a surgical glove, to create with,
Like a soft mask to triumph and be grotesque in
On the bed of birth.

Lying among the "bloody cloths" of the bed of birth the new mother wept in joy, "Holding what had come out of you to cry", and exultantly went to the phone "to announce to the world/what Life had made of you". She gave birth to not only a new baby, but also became the mother of her own new identity. It was the death of the old self of the "desperate days and weepings". Hughes characterizes death not as a "poetic death", but real triumph of Life through real motherhood—"your whole body borrowed/By immortality and its promise", giving birth to the new Plath, resembling the great mother of the gods with the moon—emblem of barrenness—"Between her hip-bones and crowned with ears of corn."

But Sylvia's "poetic death"—the Jungian individuation process of a symbolic death of the old self and the rebirth of the new self²⁸—and the immense suffering it brought to Hughes is presented in Hughes's poem "Suttee" (*BL*, p. 147-9). Sylvia Plath introduced her poem "Lady Lazarus" by saying that "The speaker is a woman who has the great and terrible gift of being reborn. The only trouble is, she has to die first. She is the phoenix, the libertarian spirit, what you will. She is also just a good, plain, very resourceful woman." (*CPSP*, p. 294) In his poem "Suttee" Ted Hughes speaks of Sylvia Plath who is like this woman speaking in "Lady Lazarus". In her first breakdown and attempted suicide (24 August 1954) Sylvia Plath lay unconscious for three days in a crawlspace in the basement of their house at Wellesley, but later she was found with a scar on her right cheek and gradually she recovered first at Massachusetts General Hospital and later at MacLean Hospital. This recovery later led her—probably encouraged by her husband—to develop the myth of a symbolic death and rebirth—the death of the old despondent self and the birth of a new self, a new identity, a new poetic voice. The reborn or resurrected Plath was like a "deity", "the holy one" (*BL*, p. 147). This holiness is reemphasized by reference to the "three days" for which Plath had remained unconscious or "dead"

before regaining consciousness, reminding of Christ's Resurrection three days after his Crucifixion. Besides, the imagery of the star and the straw in "the star/That would soon fall into our straw" (BL, p. 148) also suggests the Nativity or Christ's birth in the manger.

This first death-and-rebirth had made them prepare for another "new birth". They carefully tended the "white birth-bed of your rebirth, /The unforthcoming delivery, the all-but-born, /The ought-by-now-to-be-born." In this myth Sylvia Plath was to play the part of her "own mother" and Hughes the part of her "midwife". Both of them waited expectantly, fearfully and joyfully the emergence of this new poetic voice. The imagery of the speaker busy with the towels, kettles of hot water, placebo, massaging the cramps and inducing a peaceful sleep in the anxious mother, laying his ear to their unborn and its heartbeat, suggests the care and intense love and involvement of the "midwife" Hughes in this process of the new birth.

Finally, ending the anticipation of "Night after night, weeks, months, years" the new birth happened or rather exploded in flames and screams:

And you had been delivered of yourself
In flames. Our newborn
Was your own self in flames.
And the tongues of those flames were your tongues.
I had delivered an explosion
Of screams that were flames. (BL, p. 148-49)

These "screeching flames" are metaphors for the new poems of Plath in her *Ariel* phase. The *Ariel* voice was released. But these new poems created a new myth—in which the husband was coalesced in the image of the father—as in "Daddy"—and neither the father nor the husband could escape the "torching gusher". The labour-cries of Sylvia Plath "refracted, modulating . . . to the screams/Of the mourner/Just after death far-off in prehistory." Do these screams refer to long-suppressed mourning for her long-dead father? The flames not only burned the father but also the "midwife". This "mourner", this "old/Babe of dark flames and screams", consumed Hughes and "the new babe of light" as well as the father, "sucked the oxygen out of" all of them. Observing the consequences, Hughes the midwife was shattered, "dissolved", "engulfed /In a flood, a dam-burst thunder/Of new myth." Hughes the husband now cannot obliterate from his memory of what happened to his wife:

You were a child-bride
On a pyre.
Your flames fed on rage, on love
And on your cries for help.
Tears were a raw fuel. (BL, p. 149)

Sylvia Plath burned herself in anger and in love expressed through her

later poems in order to unite with her father, as the suttee used to burn herself in a pyre to follow her dead husband. Perhaps the estranged wife Sylvia Plath also wanted to reunite with her estranged husband by ascending the pyre in rage and in love. Didn't she behave like a "child-bride" in this ritual self-sacrifice of Suttee? The poems of *Birthday Letters* attest to the fact that she has reunited with her husband after her ritual death which is also a rebirth.

Ted Hughes's affair with Assia Wevill brought the proverbial bad patch in the happy conjugal life of him and Plath²⁹ and created the rift between them. In "Dreamers" Hughes examines this relationship. Hughes narrates Sylvia's fascination for Assia—"She fascinated you", as Assia embodied the "dream" of her "dream-self": she was a Jew born in Germany, and had a "many-blooded beauty": she came of a German mother and a Russian Jewish immigrant father who had been a "Doctor to the Bolshoi Ballet". The family left Germany during the Second World War, went first to Palestine and then to Canada. Sylvia Plath saw her as representing the victims of Nazi atrocities, and saw "hanged women choke, dumb, through her", and could unconsciously identify herself with Assia as she, too, had often imagined herself in her poetic mythology as a Jew and a victim of her German father's neglect and abandonment. Or she might have a premonition of her own death through her. But there was more complexity in her fascination for Assia. Hughes felt Assia's cultivated Kensington accent still had an undercurrent of her German that reminded Sylvia of her own "ancestral Black Forest whisper" with an added attraction of Assia being, like her own parents, a German refugee, and also Jewish victim with "greasy, death-camp, soot-softness". She evoked a sense of sympathy in Sylvia: "Her eyes caressed you,/ Melted a weeping glitter at you." But there was also an unknown fear in Sylvia about this thrice-married, fashionable, rather glamorous, woman in expensive flame-orange silk, gold bracelets and mascara. To the literary-minded, academically brilliant Sylvia who never much bothered about make-up or ornament, Assia was a "creature from beyond the fringe of [her] desk-lamp." When Assia listened to or watched her, Sylvia saw "Her black-ringed grey iris, slightly unnatural,/ Was Black Forest wolf, a witch's daughter/ Out of Grimm." She was terrified with unknown fear when this "witch's daughter" touched the hair of her children with her "tiger-painted nails." With "her many-blooded beauty" she might be "Europe's mystical jewel" but she was also a "German/Russian Israeli with the gaze of demon/ Between curtains of black Mongolian hair." Hughes names this demon as Lilith in "Dreamers":

Who was this Lilith of abortions
Touching the hair of your children
With tiger-painted nails?

In Jewish tradition Lilith is a night demon who preys on men, endangers women in childbirth, is a child-killing witch, particularly strangling helpless neonates. It is said that when Adam and Eve separated he fathered demons from the spirits that were attached to him. At this time Lilith bore him many male and female demons. In one version of the myth Lilith was the first wife of Adam, refused to submit to him and flew from him and later became the permanent partner of Samael or Satan. Lilith is also described as a beautiful female who can transform herself as a blue butterfly-like demon and is associated with the power of seduction. She is portrayed as the incarnation of lust, causing men to be led astray.³⁰ Thus the Jewish Assia Gutman Wevill is presented as a beautiful but evil woman, a femme fatale, who caused Ted Hughes to leave his wife.

Hughes says that having spent a single night under their roof at Court Green one weekend, Assia was still unaware that the "dreamer in her" had fallen in love with him but he knew that the "dreamer" in him had fallen in love with her. There is an attempt to suggest that this love affair happened in a dream—both of them were "dreamers"—and that it was not a deliberately started affair. Hughes accepts the truth that he "knew it", that is, he was aware of the consequences of this relationship, but like a dreamer he had no power of resisting the drift of the events. In the beginning of the poem, too, this sense of fatalism, helplessness and passivity has been emphasized. They were all "inert ingredients" for the experiment of the "Fate" controlling Assia's life; the Fate searched them out and "assembled" them. All the three characters in this tragic love-triangle were "puppets" for the enactment of this "Fable" (the myth of Lilith?) predetermined by some invisible Fate.

The last group of poems of *Birthday Letters* offer glimpses of the life of Hughes and their children after her death. The dead Sylvia is also a disembodied presence. The poem "Life after Death" begins with the assumption that she knew every details of the life that had survived her: "What can I tell you that you do not know/Of life after death?" She survives in the resemblance of her eyes with those of her son ("So perfectly your eyes", BL, p. 182); her daughter's fingers bring up the memory of her fingers: "And your daughter's/Fingers remember your fingers/In everything they do." ("Fingers", BL, p. 194) He warns his children of the "not dogs/That seem to be dogs" that "batten/On the cornucopia/Of her body", "bite the face off her grave-stone,/Gulp down the grave ornaments." ("The Dogs Are Eating Your Mother", BL, p. 195) He imagines a reunion of old friends and new friends on her sixtieth birthday attended by famous authors, publishers, professors and finds everybody laughing. Even her parents and children are also laughing. And the stars, the forces of fate, and Ariel—the new poetic self of Plath—

are also happy at the turn of events, as Plath has become a famous poet achieving posthumous fame. But their conjugal life was shattered and so they cannot join the laughter: "Only you and I do not smile" ("Freedom of Speech", BL, p. 192).

In the final poem of the book ("Red" BL, pp. 197-98) Hughes remembers the two selves that constituted Sylvia Plath. He recalls: "Red was your colour. /If not red, then white. But red/Was what you wrapped around you." Red would associate her with a dazzling vitality, with battle and a spirit of conquering all obstruction. Whiteness would remind her of "precious heirloom bones, the family bones", perhaps also of the dead covered with white shrouds in her hospital city, in particular her dead father. Sylvia "hid from the bone-clinic whiteness" surrounding herself in the colour red: the bedroom, the carpet, the curtains, the cushions, the window-seat, her velvet full skirt, her lipstick—all must be red, "raw carmine", "deep crimson". Outside the window she would be preoccupied with poppies, salvias—also blood-coloured flowers—and the roses. For her, the roses were a sort of weapon to defeat the sickly or deathly whiteness, bloodlessness or lifelessness: "Everything you painted you painted white/Then splashed it with roses, defeated it". Thus she "reveled in red". Her poems are also like blood-red roses: "heart's last gout,/ Catastrophic, arterial, doomed."

For Hughes, however, the colour will inevitably conjure up images of raw blood, of wound, "blood-falls", "blood lobbing from a gash":

I felt it raw—like the crisp gauze edges
Of a stifening wound. I could touch
The open vein in it, the crusted gleam.

He remembers, though, that the Sylvia who "reveled in red" had another, less known, identity, a "kindly spirit" for whom, Hughes thinks, "Blue was better". Blue reminds one of "wings", of the freedom of the limitless sky. Blue was the colour of the sea off Nauset of Plath's childhood so lovingly described in her essay "Ocean-1212": "I sometimes think my vision of the sea is the clearest thing I own."³¹ The colour blue has also survived in Hughes's memory with Plath's pregnancy which she passionately wanted.³² Thus blue signifies caring, nurturing motherhood, protection, guardianship, some hidden flowing energy ("electrified" spirit), and relief. In her relentless revelry in "red", feels Ted Hughes, "the jewel [she] lost was blue." But he thinks that perhaps none but he — at least not the dogs that are eating his children's mother — can have any awareness that "Blue was [her] kindly spirit". However, he knows, too, that the two images of Sylvia cannot be split up. Her true identity was inseparably made up of red and blue.

CONCLUSION

Ted Hughes's poetic career has to be seen as a process of development and his work, as an interconnected, unified, organic whole. One must look for relationships between poem and poem and discover links of themes, images, metaphors that echo and reecho from one book to another. The comprehensive structure of his work is as important as the structure of a single poem.

In his early stage (*The Hawk in the Rain* and *Lupercal*) he observes Nature closely, perceives the tremendous stirrings behind the scene, and brings his perceptions within the apprehension of his readers with an astounding force of imagination and verbal power. This is the poetry of scientific observation, desentimentalized, amoral.

Moral preoccupations creep into *Wodwo*, mellowing the serve and volley game of the first two books with fine touch play. His most absorbing and dexterous achievement is *Crow*, which becomes a modern classic by skilfully blending philosophy, theology, sociology, myth-making, humour and bawdy non-conformism.

In *Gaudete* and *Cave Birds*, Hughes moves in a different direction—that of building up allegories in a narrative-dramatic form. His real concerns now emerge—his subjective configuration of the human predicament and goal. The story of man's liberation through experiences of pain and suffering, sacrifice and transformation, are presented with the help of myths. Though pain and suffering are transcended, hope and joy are only observed as glimmering rays on the horizon.

He emerges upon the peak of light in the next stage of his long journey—in *Season Songs*, *Moortown*, *Remains of Elmet* and *River*. Gyrating in the cycles of living Nature, he articulates, through the river's whorls, his lifetime's realization: "Only birth matters." *Wolfwatching* is a consolidation and recapitulation of positions taken earlier. His little whales "amplify the whisper/Of currents and airs, of sea-peoples/And planetary manoeuvres,/Of seasons, of shores, and of their own" and dance "Through the original Earth-drama". They chant the benediction of his poetic achievement:

We are beautiful. We stir

Our self-colour in the pot of colours

Which is the world. At each
Tail-stroke we deepen
Our being into the world's lit substance,

And our joy into the world's
Spinning bliss, and our peace
Into the world's floating, plumed peace.

(“Little Whale Song”, *WW*, pp. 47-48)

These volumes are marked by his concerns for environmental degradation. He dramatizes man's responsibility to the non-human life-forms and ecosystems and urges for the improvement of the health of the biosphere and the protection of biodiversity.

Ted Hughes ends his poetic career with the moving story of his relationship with Sylvia Plath in *Birthday Letters*, dedicated to their children Frieda and Nicholas. His communication with her did not stop with her tragic death. Written over many years, the poems return to one of the basic sources of poetry – intense love and grief for one's soul-mate.

The ultimate moral and aesthetic value of Hughes's achievement must be that it enriches, strengthens, and in a way even transforms one's perspective on life. In his vision horror, ugliness and ferocity reside side by side with tenderness and grandeur at the heart of the universe. Reality is complex because of its many dimensions. The interrelationships between all forms of life in the universe are not always overt, but they are of its vital essence. There is an indestructibility in both the living and the non-living, something that transcends and survives existing forms. Hughes's poetry goes beyond the superficial moral categories of good and evil and holds up the indivisible wholeness of life. It frees one from any residual sentimentality, cynicism and nihilistic tendencies, any bad conscience, and makes one look on life steadily and as a whole, with gratitude, joy and humility. The final feeling of going through his opus is one of positive acceptance and awakening.

APPENDIX

AN INTERVIEW WITH TED HUGHES

[This is the transcript of a tape-recorded interview with Ted Hughes. I met Hughes in Dhaka, Bangladesh, during the Asia Poetry Festival, 17-19 November 1989, where he was a Special Guest. The interview was conducted in two sessions, one at the Osmani Milanayatan, the venue of the Poetry Festival, during a tea-break on 18 November, and another in his room at Sonargaon Hotel, on 20 November. Anzed Hossein]

AH: Mr. Hughes, what exactly do you mean by the "bigger energy", which you say (in your *London Magazine* interview, January 1971) you want to invoke through the animals in your poetry?

TH: No, it isn't that I want to invoke anything. It's that in writing about certain things, in invoking certain images, certain symbols, you automatically invoke the energies that come with them. So in the whole register of levels or degrees of intensity of energy that can be invoked, corresponding to your whole register of symbols that will invoke them, you have to be very selective, you have to be very careful, you have to know that you're playing with fire, and that some energies, the one pole of the whole range of energies, the one extreme of the range of the energies, is—can be unmanageable, can invoke energies that are unmanageable. And I think, for instance, that traditionally in almost all cultures, the images of big, predatory animals have represented energies that are difficult to control.

And, as I remember it, my point was that having concentrated on a symbol of this kind, in a particular animal, in order then to control whatever I might be summoning into my life with that symbol, I then wrote another poem with it to control it.

•So it was as though I felt that in focusing on that particular symbol, just of that animal, trying to create that animal in that way, I might have summoned things into my life that'd be difficult to control. So I then made in the same poem a controlling poem which confined and controlled its energies as if you'd summoned the spirit into a magic circle which would control it. That was my meaning.

AH: About 'Hawk Roosting' you say what you meant was that simply Nature is thinking. What is your idea of Nature?

TH: Nature in the sense that the hawk only knows its own energy and

its own purpose. It doesn't compare its own energy and its own purpose with any other. And so in that sense the symbol of any element in the created universe, any living element, each one of which is fundamentally indifferent to the others,—maybe it is deeply aware of the others but in order to live it has to be indifferent, because it has to prey on them and devour them to live on. And also, the hawk represents a natural world in that the natural, the living world, the animal kingdom which are the bird, the fish, insect, the whole biological kingdom, is unaware of death. Only man knows of death, knows beforehand of death. Animals only know of death when they are beginning to die and even then maybe they don't know the process. That was my meaning.

And the hawk, in the early phases of writing it out, I had in my mind the notion of the Egyptian Horus, who was the hawk, — who was the rising sun; so he was the sun in its positive phase, so he was the first original living energy in its positive phase. But that means a very destructive phase—(Interruption).

AH: In *Wodwo* what is your quest? What are you searching for? In the 'Author's Note' there you say that the verse and the prose are 'parts of a single work', 'chapters of a single adventure'. Would you please elaborate?

TH: I suppose I am searching for what everybody is searching for—I am searching for myself, searching for ways to confront myself. Because in the West,—I don't know how it is in the East, because your whole culture is so deeply different, and your psychology is so deeply different, because of your religion, long history, different spiritual background—but in the West, our history has resulted in a psychology where human beings very easily lose touch with themselves.

Sounds ridiculous, of course, but it is the condition of most Westerners that they are no longer in touch with their real self, their own selves, and it is everybody's task in the West, and I suppose in the world actually, but, certainly it's an acute cultural preoccupation in the West, it is the business of confronting what really matters with your self, what really matters. And it is so easy to evade that, because we've no religious system that brings us face to face with that culturally. We have to do it ourselves, every man on his own. So it is most easy to avoid it, and find some way of life where you just simply never confront the problems that are really the basis of your own mind.

AH: Please tell me something about your poetic technique in *Group*, about your method of working in poem-cycles or poem-sequences.

TH: Yes, well, it's just a method.

AH: It's a method, but the poems are independent, yet it seems they are somehow related, doesn't it? Why is it so?

TH: It was originally a story. That book is really just a fragment. I had the idea of a much longer story—the whole story is much fuller, longer and those are just pieces picked out here and there in the adventure.

The whole story is more like a—My model was really *The Conference of the Birds*, you know, the Attar poem¹—that book by the Sufi poet—I'd a notion of a journey of that kind in the background, of a creature that starts out, like one of the birds in *The Conference of the Birds*, from everything, just a creature with no attribute whatsoever except the will to keep searching. And then I was to take him through all his adventures, through the Seven Valleys until he found himself. In this story of *The Conference of the Birds*, birds search for themselves, they find the Simurg, the thirty birds, they find themselves. And that was the notion, the large notion, the quest behind.

But this search for himself in my story was more developed in the sense that in finding himself he was looking for his Creator, he was looking for who'd created him—and in searching for who'd created him he had to first of all find himself and then he would have found who'd created him, that there would be the understanding, the enlightenment for who'd created him. And the evidence that accumulates through his adventures is that he's been created by just a female, that maybe he was created by his mother, or maybe he was created by the universe which is in a sense female, by a goddess, Mother Goddess, or what does it mean? She may be the (object of the) quest—that is the quest. It's a poem where the protagonist discovers that the universe that he exists in, and not necessarily we exist in, but he exists in, is a feminine universe.

AH: So is the theme in the *Cave Birds*?

TH: I suppose the *Cave Birds* really not unlike that. *Cave Birds* through—again a little adventure—where the protagonist who is a Crow, a kind of Crow, kind of raven, is judged for his mistakes, his sins and his mistakes, and his sins are in the form of cockerels and chickens. So it's as if the Crow was full of a sinning cockerel, a sinning foolish chicken. He is judged by owls, he is taken in the underworld, is judged in the underworld by the owls, the eagles and falcons and then having confessed all his sins he is executed, and then he goes into the underworld where he is judged and once he's confronted again himself, he is reborn as a falcon.

So he begins as a Crow, he goes through the phase of being a foolish cockerel, he's judged and executed for that, he goes into the underworld where he is judged in the underworld, in a sort of a Hall of Judgement, where he is judged by the owls and the eagles and having encountered himself and purged himself of his sins, he is resurrected as a falcon. That's the story, that's the outline.

AH: Please comment on the expanding, beautiful verse of *Gaudete*. On the other hand, your verse in *Cave Birds* very concentrated, compact. I particularly like the exuberant verse of *Gaudete*.

TH: The poems at the end?

AH: The poems at the end, well, they are very, you know, very concentrated, precise, almost esoteric, but, well, sometimes, I can't interpret the meaning. There is a female goddess, who, it seems, you offer obeisance to—

TH: Well, it's again a story of the hero that he is an ordinary—

AH: A story of transformation or metamorphosis? A changeling?

TH: Yes, the real hero is a minister, a Christian, a minister in the Christian religion. He is carried away into the other world by the spirits to heal the queen of the world of spirits. The basis of it in England was a story of a legendary poet in Scotland who was carried away by the fairies, to heal the queen of the fairies. And he disappears for seven years; well, that's a combination actually—two-three references are there—and he disappears in the underworld for seven years. And I combined that with another suggestion that while he was away in the underworld, the spirits filled his place in the real world with a substitute, an exact replica made out of a log, but to human beings, to all his men, to all his acquaintances, to be the same man alive.

And so that changeling, made by the spirits or the fairies, out of the log of wood, tries to carry on the work of the Christian minister, and he knows vaguely and dimly that this man's work is the gospel of love. So he interprets this at the crudest level, and he proceeds to seduce all the women of the neighbourhood, for which, eventually, the husbands, and the men of the neighbourhood, hunt him to death and kill him. And so the changeling is destroyed.

And really the whole story is run parallel to the life of the real man in the other world who is healing the queen of the spirits. And this real man suddenly finds himself back on earth, far away in the West of Ireland, and he's no idea of really what's happened to him, he's like a man, like Rip Van Winkle, come back from some other world and he's writing these strange little poems to this strange female. And I modelled those poems because I was enormously excited at that time by the translations of Tamil *vacanas*².

AH: I see—

TH: And so they were my version of Tamil *vacanas*, actual *vacanas*, my own contribution to an English tradition of Tamil *vacanas*.

AH: I see. I see.

TH: There is one wonderful collection—translations—in English (of Tamil *vacanas*).¹

AH: Please elaborate a little about the process of psychic birth, death

and rebirth which seems to be the theme of many of your later volumes, particularly *Crow*, *Gaudete* and *Cave Birds*.

- TH: I think they may be just themes that happen to appear there, because they are part of a whole lot of materials that interested me. But, you know, like many another poets, I see the whole problem that poetry works at, one of the great problems that poetry works at is to renew life, renew the poet's own life and, by implication, renew the life of the people, if they can respond to the way he has done it for himself. And because the tendency of life is to use itself up and encrust itself with an alter ego which imprisons life—this happens very quickly and the inner life then has to somehow break down that crust of ego and be renewed, and so it's a process, really, of the death of what is restraining the new life that is there, and the birth, really the rebirth, of the life that's been smothered. So I think in the work of many poets you can see that as the recurrent basic theme of their successive works. It's very easy to see, for instance, in the works of Shakespeare where every play, and certainly every tragedy, as he grows older and becomes more serious, every tragedy can be interpreted as an effort of some new tremendous surge of power and feeling to break down an enclosing mistake. And the tragedies are composed of the disastrous circumstance that in breaking down what seems to be the fixed, circumstances that estrange it, he also kills what's most precious to him; it is part of the shape of the tragedies that each play has a figure who goes mad with passion and breaks up something; and that is the vitality of the play, the play as an oeuvre; that he's killed something that is most precious to him, that made it all balanced in the process. It's as though he's gone mad, overbalanced and exhausted himself, and the whole thing is built up again, and he has to do it again, and he has to do it again, and each of the tragedies does it again. And then eventually, in the later tragedies he finds a way of salvaging this, this, the thing that he loves, he finds out a way, not killing the woman, keeping her alive, seeming to kill her but then it turns out that she hasn't been killed.

- AH: You referred to the last poems of *Gaudete*. Do you attach any particular importance to those poems?

- TH: No, but I like them. I'm not sure that it's a form that has a real context in English. So, in a way it was experimental to that extent, but I feel that maybe among English readers of English literature in general, it is a little bit without context because its context is in fact Goddess religions, in particular, the Indian mystical experience. So it is without context in English literature. So I don't know whether it's a form that one can develop within English, because it isn't natural for English. I wish it were.

- AH: In *Season Songs*, *Moortown*, *Remains of Elmet* and *River*, you have been

able to reveal what I may describe as the beauty and vitality, the glory and the power of flowers, insects and animals. In a post-industrial or highly industrialized, materialistic-rationalistic civilization, what hope do you have about the creativity or the creative power of nature?

TH: From being very young, I lived very much in the country, and was preoccupied with animals and fish and birds, and, well, that was my life, that was the only thing I was interested in. Then, although I lived in rather an industrial part of England, that is South Yorkshire, right in the coal belt—in *Poetry in the Making* I talked about it—but then I moved away and all kinds of things happened and so on. And I wrote about other things and I got interested (in other things); well, my interest took me to another direction away from that natural world that I'd grown up in. Although obviously I still used it but I didn't use it directly—I only used it as a sort of a source of metaphors and language.

But then in the seventies I felt—I was then over forty—I felt that I'd missed it out. You know it was as though I looked around and thought: why have I been neglecting this? And so then for a few years I just wrote about it directly, you know, just for myself, just to write poems about things that I loved and that excited me in that world, just simple, direct poems, because I felt I'd left it out. And I just wanted to reclaim it again, bring it back into my life. And also at that time I was farming and so I was immersed in that world anyway.

And then gradually, you know, I felt I'd reabsorbed it, I'd renewed myself, I'd reclaimed it in a sense and renewed my own relationship with it. And then because I'd engaged myself to do certain books, you know, I'd engaged myself to do a book with Fay Godwin's photographs about South Yorkshire, I'd engaged myself to do a book about rivers with the photographs of a friend of mine, I'd engaged myself to do a book about flowers and insects with a friend of mine who is a painter and a draughtsman and he wanted me to do a book about flowers and insects and I said, yes, I'll write some poems about flowers and insects, and that's the way these books happened. But in a sense, I feel that they were sort of marginal. Necessary, but marginal. For what really interests me, I think, what really interests me, is something else.

AH: But, you know, I have read somewhere some critics who say that you should proceed along those lines, that is, writing simple, direct nature poems, instead of the mythical poems.

TH: Yes, but you have to remember that the critics you're speaking about are English. They wouldn't be said by Americans. I don't know American critics could say that. I think they must be English. And within your own country, as you know, in Bangladesh, I'm sure, it's

the same; whatever work you try to do, everybody tries to stop you—it's—that's a law of writing (laughs); every writer's impression is that everybody else is trying to stop him writing what he's writing and telling him to write something else, telling him to write what they want him to write, as though you should have sent your pages along to them and said, please write my poems for me before I could publish them. And it's very like that in England.

AH: So you think that these books are marginal?

TH: In my own sense. But others, readers, may not think so. Well, everybody has a taste. And whatever certain readers and reviewers may say about my interest in mythology and folklore and religious literature and so on, it is the thing that interests me more than anything else. It's what I want to incorporate and it's the thing that I enjoy working with. It's the thing that seems to me to give me most access to what I want to express and so I (shrugs) really don't care what they think.

AH: Do you think poetry has a role to play in society?

TH: I think poetry is the psychological component of the auto-immune system, right? So you have the physical auto-immune system and in stress, in any stress, in any disaster, in any grief or mourning or just simply the stress of life, just the day-to-day biological response to the problems of your life, your immune system is in constant activity to repair the effect of this on your own body, on your own system. Your whole chemistry of your body is constantly under bombardment from external things, and your immune system is constantly repairing and renewing it. And that is a physical component of that which is actually a chemical process. But it seems to me that there is also a psychological component of it. And the psychological component is the strange business that we call Art — and poetry is simply the verbal form of that process. That's what I feel.

AH: You studied Anthropology and Archaeology at Cambridge. Have they in any way shaped your poetic attitude?

TH: I studied Anthropology and Archaeology because I was interested in Anthropology and Archaeology. I was already interested in it. So what shaped my poetic attitude, as you say, maybe because what made me interested in Anthropology and Archaeology. In other words, I was interested in other cultures, simple as that, other cultures, in a life in other cultures: I suppose I was interested in that.

AH: Are you in any way influenced by the contemporary socio-cultural events in England, say the counter-culture movement of "the swinging sixties"?

TH: You know, I was only thirty years in the swinging sixties. The effect on England of the swinging sixties was to be—it was really when

the government was far Left. And the effect was to give confidence to everything in England that was Left. So the effect was to give confidence to a whole range of social energies and voices that had been excluded from cultural expression, really, at all previous times, because that was the first time since the Education Act, just after the War, what used to be called the working classes, and who from the Education Act onwards, began to infiltrate and move into higher education. It was the first time they'd been given the confidence of their voices. And so it had the effect of releasing a great deal that had never been released in England. And it released good and bad. It released that whole range of expression from a part of society that before had hardly spoken. And that lasted maybe into the mid-seventies.

And then the drift back to the Right began, and you could see it in reviews, in every expression of the cultural—sort of disciplinary—controls of how people responded to literature and art and expressions and so on. You could see that as if it swung to the Right, it returned to a repressive situation, as far as those voices were concerned, and they gradually disappeared from expression and were replaced by the old voices of—what's too simple to call—the Right. But they were replaced basically by those cultural values that existed in England before the War. And so the swinging sixties can be seen, I think, as a moment when, quite suddenly, the Left and all that world which corresponded to the Left, that world which had never really attained expression in England, suddenly had the liberty to express itself and the confidence to express itself—it's a matter of confidence—that had somehow been given the confidence because the Government was Left. And I don't know whether I was affected by that or not. You must, one must be affected by that kind of broad movement in the community you live in, you have to be affected by it. And it made many things possible which later became difficult, as I think you can see it in many writers. And that whether it affected me, I don't know. I don't know. I really don't know because I didn't take part in pop music. I was never able to respond to pop music.

AH: But you were interested in, you know, in mystic cults etc—

TH: Yes, but I was interested in the mystic cults in 1948.

AH: '48!

TH: Yes, I mean I began reading those texts of religious values at 14, 15, 16—

AH: You have on various occasions referred, to Shamanism, Sufism and Tibetan Buddhism, particularly *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. You have reviewed Idries Shah's *The Sufis* Eliade's *Shamanism*. In a poem in *Wodwo* you've mentioned the Cabbala. Why are you interested in these mystic cults?

TH: Yes, well I was making—I was invited by a Chinese musician to make an oratorio of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* 1959, long before the swinging sixties had got going, and before that I knew the *Bardo Thodol* well. I mean I studied this at the University when I was 20. That whole popular interest in these things, Sufism and so on, that became general in the sixties, was just something that happened. They happened. It amazed me that all these people should be interested in things without my private curiosity. (Interruption). Well, what were we talking about? I think I've more or less answered that.

AH: You were talking about the Chinese musician who met you in 1959.

TH: Yes, I was writing the script to produce the *Bardo* as a dance oratorio. But then I've been interested in Shamanism since I was seventeen or eighteen. I was surprised when all these became very popular in the sixties. When I first studied it, you couldn't buy these books, you could only find them in old libraries, they were very difficult to find. Then quite suddenly they were best sellers. In the sixties they became best sellers—yes, I was amazed. But—I kept separate from it, really, because I was—I didn't have carried on as I had before, but inevitably, as I say, you are—

The fact was that everybody was interested in these things mainly—that lots of people understood more or less what I was writing about, because a lot of that (was) what I had always been interested in. Inevitably, something of that was in what I wrote; and suddenly there was a generation that had some idea of what I was writing about, whereas the generation as far as of now, doesn't. They don't know anything of these things. Because all that world of interest in Sufis, in Eastern mysticism or primitive mysticism, has now again become the curiosity of the specialists. It's no longer the general sort of reading of the average student or even the reasonably literate student or even the student of literature. They are not interested in those things.

AH: No, my point is whether there is any influence in *Wodwo*, of, for instance, mysticism. You refer to the Cabbala there.

TH: Yes, who knows, yes, presumably, presumably. I became very interested in the Cabbala, long ago. These things inevitably appear in what you write, because they're what you think about.

AH: Please tell me something about your method of working in myths. You rework old myths and often create new myths. Why do you find myths or the mythic method so useful for your poetic purpose?

TH: Well, I'm just interested in mythology—I'm just interested. I've always been interested in folklore, in ballads, that sort of thing. As soon as I read that sort of thing as I read novels, it just simply interests me and it's been always like that since I was a boy. And so in my writing, I suppose, I've seen ways of finding forms of expression

out of my familiarity with that mythical world, with that world of story-making, that kind of metaphysics, as the kind of way my mind now works. I've been saturated in it so long, and I suppose, one could say, maybe, that kind of mythical style of things creeps occasionally into things I've written; but never deliberately, I've not particularly created the mythology or anything else of that sort. And I don't particularly want to use mythology, you know, to take this myth and turn it into that work. If there's anything mythical and so on into what I write, I want it to be something that I just find in—out of my own psychology. And I really never give it, fit it back into any particular, previous, established, mythological, fake context—I don't want to do that, I don't want anybody to need to know some particular mythology before he can understand of what I'm talking about. So really I'm talking about mythical kind of idea, mythical kind of thinkers which I like, and so I suppose that appears there. But the actual use of different myths for that purpose is not the way I work.

AH: But do you find myths convenient for your purpose?

TH: Well, obviously, I make reference to those mythical types of figures—

AH: But they are your own creations?

TH: They are my own creations, yes. As soon as you start referring to other people's mythology you become merely—I suppose—you know, obviously one does that occasionally, because that's part of everybody's culture. I recently wrote a piece about a Jewish myth, a very precise, early myth about the demon goddess Lilith and the sister-goddess Mahomot. And that was a very specific story that provided a very specific image for something I wanted to write about a very specific situation. I didn't want to write about the myth, I wanted to use that myth just to give myself distance from a particular situation that I wanted to write about.

Well, that's an instance of using a specific old Hebrew myth, o.k.? That I'm not talking about the myth, I'm talking about the modern situation and merely using the myth to conceal the fact that it's a modern situation, and using it as a screen, not as a way of making a poem mythical. That was something that I could not have written about in immediate terms. And in that, in cases like that, maybe, you can use the art, mythical ideas or curiosity, as you might use the life of Pedro or you know, the death of Goethe as an idea, maybe as an image, as a mythical idea, use them simply as an image, what T.S. Eliot called an 'objective correlative', give you just an image, as the outline of a fable.

AH: What is your attitude to your contemporaries like Larkin, Gunn, Wain, Amis or the Movement poets?

TH: Well, they were really—we call them Movement poets, they were the last wave of the regular English poetry as it had been through

the century before the sixties, before that wave of the sixties. And in a way that volume called the *Movement*¹ was a sort of last stand, a defiant last stand to affirm the values represented in that collection, which are values of a fixed metric, a fixed and disciplined, traditional metric with tight rhyme, regular iambics, fixed verse forms and so on, and a sort of discursive, ironic treatment of the material. Understated, discursive, ironic, very rational, yes, very sober, very English. And there were very good poets among them.

But it was really the last moment before everything suddenly became very free for a few years, and then chaos entered the English Literature, it entered via American literature, via European literature, and then for ten-fifteen years, anything went. And then gradually those values, as I say, reasserted themselves. They reasserted themselves in slightly different forms, slightly freer forms really, slightly freer external forms; but in spirit they're the same; they're the same, of particular mood, and discursive, basically discursive. Maybe they replaced the kind of deliberate placing of imagery rather than a deliberate and ordered placing of argument, but basically the principle of rational restraint is the same.

AH: But you are completely different from them?

TH: Well, I am. I just—I suppose, I just absorbed all kinds of things wherever I felt that I could adjust it or I could use it or, you know, gave me something that I could make my own. And I don't feel particularly hostile to these poets. I like a lot in all. I'm a great admirer of Larkin, Thom Gunn. Gunn, I think, he's a wonderful poet.

AH: Gunn was often associated with you.

TH: Yes, he was, because we were in the University at the same time and we were both published by Faber and Faber at the same time—and we've always been friends; but our poetry is very different. But I do like his work very much, I like his mind.

AH: Who among the recent, younger poets do you think are close to the universe of your poetry? Who do you think are the most promising poets among the younger generation?

TH: That's very difficult to say. I make a rule of saying nothing about the younger or the living, if possible, nothing about the living. I've lived long enough to know that every remark you make about a living person makes enemies. I don't mind making enemies (laughs), but why make more than I already have?

AH: (Laughing) No, no, but they sometimes can make friends also.

TH: Yes they can make friends. But when you say he is a wonderful poet, everybody else feels insulted (laughs heartily).

AH: Right; so you would refrain from making any comment on this. But do you think your poetry has a therapeutic role to play in our

contemporary materialistic-rationalistic society?

TH: I don't know whether it's any role to play at all, I don't have any thoughts about that.

AH: But you might have some purpose behind writing these poems?

TH: No, my purpose in writing poems is to satisfy that strange sort of impulse one has to write; what is that impulse I don't know. I certainly don't have any idea of writing for some purpose, or for some social purpose, not at all.

AH: No, it may not be any direct social purpose, but—

TH: Well, it's the same. If anybody finds any use in them, that's something else. But it's not any particular use that I put there.

AH: But don't you think that the materialistic-rationalistic situation is rather crippling our souls?

TH: Yes, I do, yes, yes, I would like to see the West completely injected by the East, I would like it—, to see it completely suffused by the East. I think what the West needs is a lot of the spirit of the East. That's why I think during the sixties there was an enormous thirst for Eastern things. Because we know that the whole world, the whole spiritual world, on which the East still floats in many different ways and forms and so on—from extreme fundamentalism to philosophical mysticism—nevertheless, there is an easy acceptance throughout Eastern society that existence is based on spiritual things.

And in the West, you see, that's gone. And the misery and unhappiness of the West under its apparent prosperity is a misery that everybody lives in. It's a deep unhappiness that every individual Westerner lives in. And they know that no matter how much they have, they don't have the important thing which is to be happy, and they know what they are lacking is something, some sort of spiritual foundation. They know that they are lacking it because that's what human beings are, need; they know that they've been cut off from it. But they don't know how to find it. They do not find it in man. They don't want it in that religion, because that is too narrowing and dogmatic and crippling; they don't want it in that religion because that was too this, or that religion becomes too that. They want some invented new spiritual reality that hasn't been discovered. And so the whole thing is a search and search and search—. And they feel that it's there in the East, maybe, maybe, there's something to be learnt there, but they don't know what. Maybe they should bring it again, invent it again out of themselves, but they don't know how.

AH: What do you mean by this 'spirit of the East'?

TH: Well, I think it is that the Western society is basically materialist and Eastern society basically isn't materialist. Even though it's adopting very rapidly technology and science and so on, it's giving out its

spiritual foundation with great reluctance. And maybe the East will find some way of making all these things live together. Why not? Why should science remove one's sense of spiritual existence? It shouldn't. There's no necessity for it. It's just—it's all a case of reinventing your idea of God, you know, because the old notion of the Christian God fizzled out and was discredited by science. They think that's gone, the whole thing—the whole thing disappeared with it.

AH: Can I ask one textual question, please? What is the idea of the first two poems of *Crow*? What do you wish suggest by these?

TH: The first two, where I talk about the 'Lineage'? Well, that's a kind of—that's just a sort of scanning cartoon.

AH: Cartoon!

TH: As far as I remember, yes, about that; just a way of locating, you know, the material, an early attempt to locate the material, nothing more than that.

AH: O. K. thank you. When are you leaving Bangladesh?

TH: Friday.

AH: Do you have any plan to come to India, to Calcutta?

TH: Yes. I do. But I don't know when. Let's see.

AH: I mean not immediately? Not in the near future?

TH: No, this is really an unusual amount of travel for me.

AH: No, I thought that since you are in Dhaka, and Calcutta is half an hour's journey from here, you may—

TH: No, I should have been back in London tonight.

AH: What are you writing at the moment? We have seen your *What is the Truth?* and nothing more after that.

TH: Well, they've published a book of mine this year.

AH: I haven't seen it yet.⁵

TH: Now what is the idea of *What is the Truth?* It is that in spite of the fact that everything on earth gets such a bad time, all the animals, all the birds and fish on earth have a difficult time from man, because he kills them, or he fights them, he enslaves them, he eats them—
• this is apart from the fact that they are killing them each other and eating as well, of course. Nevertheless, that doesn't alter the fact that they are all part of the great Creative Idea. And at the end of the story, God's Son, nevertheless, having heard what's happened to all the animals, walks down into the earth, into the world to join men where he will also be killed and eaten.

AH: And do you like to make any comment on *River*, particularly?

TH: No, nothing to say about that except that they're just poems about memories of rivers, you know, that I've (seen).

AH: Thank you very much. Mr. Hughes.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

Introduction

1. For a discussion of Hughes as dramatist see Fred Rue Jacobs, "Hughes and drama" in Keith Sagar, ed. *The Achievement of Ted Hughes* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1983), pp. 154-70; Hughes's contribution to children's literature has been evaluated by Keith Cushman, "Hughes' poetry for children" in Sagar, ed. *The Achievement*, pp. 239--56; Hughes's literary criticism has been assessed by Philip Smallwood, "Creators as Critics 1: Ted Hughes" in *Modern Critics in Practice* (Hampstead, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), Ch. vii. Most of his occasional prose has now been collected and published in Ted Hughes, *Winter Pollen: Occasional Prose*, ed., William Scammell (London: Faber and Faber, 1994).
2. Here Erich Fromm's categories of "benign aggression" and "malignant aggression" can be useful; see Fromm, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (London: Jonathon Cape, 1974).
3. See Appendix, p. 162.

Chapter One : The Literary Scene

1. Robert Conquest, Introduction to *New Lines*—II (London: Macmillan, 1963), p. xiii.
2. "Ten Comments on a Questionnaire", *London Magazine*, 4 (November, 1964), p. 28.
3. G.S. Fraser, "Experiment in Verse" in *Vision and Rhetoric* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959) p. 243.
4. Barnard Bergonzi, "After 'The Movement'", *Listener*, 66 (24 August 1961), pp. 284-85. In the article Bergonzi refers to the views of George MacBeth, Graham Hough, and A. Alvarez. See also Philip Hobsbaum. "The Road Not Taken". *Listener*, 66 (23 Nov. 1961), pp. 860-63. Conquest, Introduction to *New Lines* II, p. xxiv; Hobsbaum, *P. Tradition and Experiment in English Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1979) pp. 255-88.
5. Conquest, Introduction to *New Lines* (1956; rpt. London: Macmillan, 1962), p. xvii..
6. Philip Larkin in his Introduction to the 1966 reprint of *The North Ship* (London : Faber and Faber, 1945) pp. 9-10, describes his shift from the influence of Yeats towards a discipleship of Hardy, and Donald Davie attaches the importance of a religious conversion to this event; see Donald Davie. Introduction to *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry* (1972; British edn. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973) p.4.
7. Conquest, Introduction to *New Lines*. pp. xvii-xviii.
8. Blake Morrison. *The Movement: Poetry and Fiction of the 1950s* (1980; rpt. London: Methuen, 1986), p. 92, quotes the views of Amis, Davie and Wain to conclude that "The Movement thus defined themselves in opposition to

- the 1930s generation, both socially . . . and politically."
9. Though John Press in *Rule and Energy* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1963), p. 37, quotes Donald Davie as writing in a letter to the *London Magazine* in March 1954 that "the death of Dylan Thomas was very sad, and it is clear that some of the poems he wrote are going to be remembered for a very long time", the kind of poetry Davie and other contributors to *New Lines* preferred was totally opposite to what Thomas had produced. See also Blake Morrison, *The Movement: Poetry and Fiction of the 1950s* (1980; rpt. London: Methuen, 1986), p. 25.
 10. John Wain's words quoted by Ian Hamilton, "The Forties" (I), *London Magazine* 4 (April 1964) p. 81.
 11. Philip Larkin, "Statement", *Required Writing* (London: Faber and Faber, 1983), p. 79.
 12. See Blake Morrison, pp. 193-94.
 13. Conquest, Introduction to *New Lines*, p. xiv.
 14. *Ibid.*, p. xv.
 15. *Ibid.*, p. xviii.
 16. Ted Hughes, "After the first fright", *Cave Birds* (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), p.10.
 17. "In the Movement", *Spectator*, No. 6588 (1 October 1954), p. 400. It was published anonymously, though later J.D. Scott revealed that he, then literary editor, had written this; see note 19 below.
 18. *Ibid.*, p. 399.
 19. J.D. Scott, "A chip of literary history", *Spectator*, 238 (16 April 1977), p.20, describes how letters "came from all over Britain, then from America, from France, from Italy. Articles too".
 20. Blake Morrison, *The Movement*; see also Elizabeth Jennings, "The Making of a Movement", *Spectator*, No. 7110 (2 Oct. 1964), pp. 446-448; Bernard Bergonzi, "After 'The Movement'", *Listener*, 24 Aug 1961, pp. 284-285.
 21. Quoted in Morrison, *The Movement*, p. 43.
 22. Bernard Bergonzi, "After 'The Movement'", *Listener*, 66 (24 Aug 1961), p. 285.
 23. Howard Sergeant and Dannie Abse, ed. *Mavericks* (London Editions Poetry and Poverty, 1957).
 24. See Thom Gunn's and Philip Larkin's interviews with Ian Hamilton, "Four Conversations", *London Magazine*, 4 (Nov. 1964), pp. 64-77; Elizabeth Jennings, in "The Making of a Movement", spoke of her "resistance to being linked with other poets" who seemed to share with nothing but a nearness in age, sometimes not even that.
 25. *Spectator* 1 Oct. 1954, pp. 399-400.
 26. Philip Larkin, "An Interview with *Paris Review*", rpt. in *Required Writing*, p. 75.
 27. See "A New Aestheticism? A. Alvarez talks to Donald Davie", in Ian Hamilton, ed. *The Modern Poet: Essays from "the Review"*, (London: Macdonald, 1968), p. 167.
 28. A. Alvarez. "Beyond the Gentility Principle", rpt. in *Beyond All this Fiddle* (London: Allen Lane, 1968), pp. 34-44.
 29. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

30. Ibid., p.41.
31. Charles Tomlinson, "The Middlebrow Muse", *Essays in Criticism* 7 (April 1957), p. 213.
32. Donald Davie, "Remembering the Movement", *Prospect* (Summer 1959), rpt. in *The Poet in the Imaginary Museum: Essays of two Decades*, ed. by Barry Alpert (Manchester: Carcanet, 1977), p. 74.
33. Quoted in John Press, *Rule and Energy* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1963) p. 50.
34. Donald Davie, *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry*, p.64.
35. *Spectator*, 2 October 1964, p. 447.
36. Ekbert Faas, *Ted Hughes: The Unaccommodated Universe* (Santa Barbara, Calif: Block Sparrow Press 1980) pp. 11-12.
37. "Ted Hughes and Crow", *London magazine*, 10 (January 1971), p.11, rpt. in Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 201.
38. "Desk Poet", interview with John Horder, *Guardian*, 23 March 1965.
39. See Faas, *The unaccommodated universe*, pp. 202-203 and pp. 212-13.
40. Ibid., p. 202.
41. Ibid., p. 203.
42. Seamus Heaney, "Hughes and England" in *The Achievement of Ted Hughes*, ed. Keith Sagar (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1983) p. 15.
43. See "Desk Poet", interview with John Horder, *Guardian*, 23 March 1965 and Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 202.

Chapter Two : The Sociopolitical Background

1. Blake Morrison, *The Movement*, pp. 12, 14.
2. Thomas West, *Ted Hughes* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 13.
3. See Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 201.
4. See W.N. Medlicott, *Contemporary England. 1914-1964*, 3rd impression with epilogue, 1964-1974, (London: Longman, 1976), p.471 "Labour won 393 seats and the Conservatives 213, a gain for Labour of 230."
5. Quoted by Morrison, *The Movement*, p. 44.
6. Donald Davie, "Augustans New and Old", *Twentieth Century*, 158 (Nov. 1955), p. 465.
7. John Wain, ed. *Anthology of Modern Poetry*, (London: Hutchinson, 1963), pp. 34-35.
8. See Morrison, p. 57.
9. John Holloway, "New Lines in English Poetry", *Hudson Review*, 9 (1956-7), 592-7; quoted in Morrison, p. 55.
10. Donald Davie, letter to O'Connor, 31 Dec. 1957; quoted in Morrison, p. 58.
11. See Morrison, p. 75.
12. Ibid., p. 12.
13. Davie, *Collected Poems 1950-1970* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 9-10.
14. See Morrison, pp. 81-88.
15. Laslett, "The Changing Face of English Education", *Texas Quarterly* (Winter 1960), p. 19; quoted by Morrison, p. 15.

16. See Kingsley Amis, "Masters", in Robert Conquest, ed., *New Lines*, pp. 43-44.
17. See Davie, "Rejoinder to a Critic", *New Lines*, p. 67.
18. See Larkin's poems "At Grass" and "Toads", both published in *The Less Deceived* (1955) and both reprinted in *The Oxford Book of Twentieth-Century English Verse*, ed. Philip Larkin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 531-39. Morrison in *The Movement*, pp. 82-84, argues that "by allowing the horses [in "At Grass"] to symbolize loss of power, Larkin manages to tap nostalgia for a past 'glory that was England'."
19. A. Alvarez, "Beyond the Gentility Principle", in *Beyond All This Fiddle* (London: Allen Lane, 1968).
20. David Thomson, *England in the Twentieth Century* (1914-79), 2nd ed. (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 281.
21. Thomson, p. 287.
22. See Morrison, pp. 248-50.
23. Davie, "Creon's Mouse", *Collected Poems*, pp. 9-10.
24. W. N. Medlicott, *Contemporary England*, p. 505, draws attention to the fact that "there was a marked conservative swing among politically-minded students in the universities."
25. Fass, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 201.
26. Amis, "Here is Where", *New Lines*, p. 48.
27. Alistair Davies and Peter Saunders, "Literature, Politics, Society" in *Society and Literature 1945-1970*, ed. Alan Sinfield (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 21.
28. *The Campaign Guide*, (London: Conservative and Unionist Central Office, 1964), p. 173.
29. See Thomson, p. 260.
30. Alistair Davies and Peter Saunders in Sinfield, p. 20.
31. Alan Sillitoe, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1958; rpt. London: Pan, 1960).
32. John Braine, *Room at the Top* (1957; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961).
33. See Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 199.
34. Ted Hughes, review of *The Selected Letters of Dylan Thomas*, ed. Constantine Fitzgibbon, *New Statesman*, 72 (25 Nov. 1966), p. 783.
35. See Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, pp. 197-98.
36. The following lines of Hughes in "The Warriors of the North" (*W*, p. 159) are suggestive of this idea:

But this timely expenditure of themselves,
 A cash-down, beforehand revenge, with extra,
 For the gruelling relapse and prolongeur of their blood
 Into the iron arteries of Calvin.
37. Hughes, review of *Myth and Religion of the North* by E.O.G. Turville-Petre, *The Listener*, 71 (19 March 1964), pp. 484-85.
38. Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 201.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 198.
40. See Thomas West, *Ted Hughes* (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 14-15.
41. Hughes, review of *The Selected Letters of Dylan Thomas*, p. 783.
42. Hughes, "Context", *London Magazine*, 1 (Feb. 1962), pp. 44-45.

43. Thomson, p. 352.
44. Hughes, *Gaudete* (London: Faber & Faber, 1977), pp. 44-45 and p. 57.
45. Thomson, p. 354.
46. In his prose writings, Hughes refers to the suppression of women especially under religious sanctions, in "Myth and Education", *Children's Literature in Education*, 1 (1970), p. 70; in his review of *The Environmental Revolution* by Max Nicholson, rpt. Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 186.
47. Thomson, p. 355.
48. *Ibid.*, pp. 355-56.
49. Hughes refers to his interest in Eastern mythology and folklore in many places; see especially Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 205; "Desk Poet", *Guardian*, 23 March 1965.
50. See Alan Sinfield, "Varieties of Religion", in Alan Sinfield, ed., *Society and Literature 1945-1970*, p. 92.
51. Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 205.
52. Alan Sinfield, p. 90.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
54. Quoted in Sinfield, p. 97 and p. 92.
55. Faas, *The unaccommodated Universe*, p. 200.
56. Hughes, review of *The Selected Letters of Dylan Thomas*, p. 783.
57. Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 198.

Chapter Three : The Hughes Mindscape

1. See Appendix, p. 256.
2. See Keith Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 8, and his reference to the story recorded by W. S. Merwin; see also Hughes's interview with John Horder, "Desk Poet", *Guardian*, 23 March 1965; Ted Hughes *Winter Pollen*, pp. 8-9.
3. Thomas West, *Ted Hughes* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 14.
4. Faas, *The Unacomodated Universe*, p. 202.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 41, p. 205.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 203.
7. Hughes, review of *Myth and Religion of North* by E.O.G. Turville-Petre, *Listener*, 71 (19 March 1964), pp. 484-85.
8. Hughes, Introduction to Vasko Popa's *Collected Poems 1943-76*, trans. Anne Pennington (Manchester: Carcanet, 1978), p. 7.
9. See Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 206.
10. Hughes, review of *Shamanism* by Mircea Eliade and *The Sufis* by Idries Shah in *Listener*, 72 (29 Oct. 1964), pp. 677-78.
11. Hughes review of *Voss* by Patrick White, *Listener*, 71 (6 Feb. 1964), pp. 229-30.
12. "Wino", "Stations", "Skylarks" may be cited as examples where the pattern of experience follow and realize the quest; but "Cadenza" exemplifies part of the journey.
13. Letter to Keith Sagar, in Keith Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1978), p. 107.

14. Appendix, p. 257.
15. See Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, p. 106.
16. Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 213.
17. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949; rpt. New York: Meridian Books, 1956), p. 30, and footnote 35, p. 30.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 37.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 245-246.
23. Hughes, "Sylvia Plath and Her Journals" in *Ariel Ascending: Writings about Sylvia Plath*, ed. Peter Alexander (New York: Harper and Row, 1985), pp. 154-56.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 163.
25. See Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, p. 228; it has been printed also in Sagar, ed. *The Achievement*, p. 315.
26. Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, p. 228.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
28. See Michael Parker, "Hughes and the poets of Eastern Europe" in *The Achievement of Ted Hughes*, ed. Sagar, pp. 37-51.
29. Hughes, "Janos Pilinszky", *Critical Quarterly*, 18 (Summer 1976), p. 86.
30. Introduction to Vasko Popa's *Collected Poems 1943-1976*, p. 3.
31. Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 213.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 212.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 213.
34. Introduction to Vasko Popa's *Collected Poems 1943-1976*, p. 6.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
38. See Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, pp. 67-68.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 231.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 66; also see Stuart Hirschberg, *Myth in the Poetry of Ted Hughes* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1981), p. 36.
41. Hughes, "Janos Pilinszky". p. 86.
42. Introduction to Vasko Popa's *Collected Poems 1943-1976*, p. 3.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
44. See, for instance, Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, p. 66, pp. 206-7, 209, and 212; Hirschberg, *Myth in the Poetry of Ted Hughes*; Terry Gifford and Neil Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), pp. 19-21, 44, 85; Michael Sweeting, "Hughes and Shamanism" in *The Achievement of Ted Hughes*, ed. Sagar, pp. 70-89.
45. Hughes, "Secret Ecstasies", review of *Shamanism* by Mircea Eliade and *The Sufis* by Idries Shah, *Listener*, 72 (29 Oct. 1964), pp. 677-78.
46. "Oriental Mythology in *Wodwo*" in Sagar, ed. *The Achievement of Ted Hughes*, pp. 126-53.
47. Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, pp. 218-19.

48. Graham Bradshaw, "Creative Mythology in *Cave Birds*" in Sagar, ed. *The Achievement of Ted Hughes*, pp. 210-238, 226, 233-34.
49. Appendix, p.
50. Hughes, "Myth and Education" in Geoff Fox et al., ed. *Writers, Critics, Children* (London Heinemann, 1976) p. 93.
51. Hughes, review of *The Sufis* by Idries Shah, *Listener*, 72 (29 Oct 1964), pp. 677-78. Rpt. "Regenerations" in *Winter Pollen*, pp. 56-59.
52. A. J. Arberry, *Sufism* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1950), p. 58.
53. *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study* (London: Faber & Faber, 1981), p. 86.
54. Arberry, p. 75.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 114
56. Idries Shah, *The Way of the Sufi* (1968; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1974, 1986), p. 68.
57. *Ibid.*, "How Far You Have Come !" pp. 110-11 and "What Shall I Be", pp. 115-16.
58. Hughes, review. of *The Sufis*, *Listener*, 72 (29 Oct. 1974). P. 678.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 678.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 678.
61. Shah, *The Sufis* (London: W. H. Allen, 1964), p. 369.
62. Freud, *The Origin and Development of Psycho-Analysis* (1909) in *The Major Works of Freud*, Great Books of the Western World Series, No. 54 (Chicago Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1952), p. 2.
63. William James, *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1901-2 Gifford Lectures; rpt. London Collins, The Fontana Library, 1960), p. 402.
64. See T. S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton" in *The Complete Poems and Plays* (Faber and Faber 1969, 1989), pp. 171-76.
65. Arberry, p. 114.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 114.
68. William James, p. 401.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 404.
70. see Appendix, p. 162.
71. Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, pp. 203-4.
72. Claire Hahn, "CJ.:QR and the Biblical creation narratives", *Critical Quarterly* 19 (Spring 1977), p. 44.
73. See Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 186.
74. Mircea Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible* (London: Rider & Co., 1960), p. 9.
75. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
76. Idries Shah, *The Sufis*, p. 194.
77. Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible*, p. 10.
78. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 128.
80. Stanislas K. De Rola, *Alchemy :The Secret Art* (London :Thames and Hudson, 1973); I have presented here a summary of De Rola, pp. 8-12.
81. Hughes, *Selected Poems, 1957-81* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), p. 237.

82. Hughes, letter to Sagar, in *The Art of Ted Hughes*, p.107.
83. Appendix, p. 242.
84. Hughes, *Poetry in the Making* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967), pp. 123-24.
85. "Myth and Education" in *Writers, Critics, and Children*, ed. Geoff Fox et al., (London: Heinemann, 1976), p. 86; henceforth referred to as Myth 2.
86. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
87. Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 199.
88. Myth 2, p. 92.
89. D. H. Lawrence, "A Propos of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, ed. Ronald Friendland (New York: Bantam Books, 1968, 1982), p. 356.
90. Myth 2, p. 87
91. Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, pp. 197-98.
92. Hughes, "Myth and Education", *Children's Literature in Education* 1 (1970), p.70; henceforth cited as Myth 1.
93. C. G. Jung, *Psychological Reflections; An Anthology of His Writings 1905-1961*, 2nd. ed., ed. Jolande Jacobi (1953; rpt, London; Ark Paperbacks, 1986), p. 92.
94. Myth 1, p. 69.
95. Myth 2, p. 88.
96. *Ibid.*, p. 90.
97. See Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 198; Myth 2, p. 89; also Myth 1, p. 57.
98. Myth 2, p. 90.
99. Myth 1, p. 60.
100. Myth 2, p. 92.
101. *Ibid.*, p. 92.
102. Hughes, *Poetry in the Making*, p. 124.
103. Myth 1, p. 69.

Chapter Four : The Early Animal Poems

1. Keith Sagar discusses the charges of early reviewers and critics in *The Art of Ted Hughes*, 2nd ed. pp. 34--35; see also Ian Hamilton's review of Crow in *T.L.S.: Essays and Reviews From the Times Literary Supplement*, 1971, (London : Oxford Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 149-53, rpt. Ian Hamilton, *A Poetry Chronicle* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), pp. 165-70; and John Lucas, *Modern English Poetry from Hardy to Hughes* (London : B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1986), pp. 193-97.
2. "Desk Poet", interview with John Horder, *Guardian*, 23 March 1965.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Geoffrey Thurley, "Beyond Positive Values; Ted Hughes" in *The Ironic Harvest* (London: Arnold, 1974), pp. 177-78.
5. see Zev Barbu, "Violence in Twentieth Century Literature", *The Modern World*, III, in the series *Literature and Western Civilization*, gen. eds. David Daiches and Anthony Thorlby. (London: Aldus Books, 1976), p. 85.
6. W.B. Yeats, "The Second Coming". in Norman Jefferies, ed. *W.B. Yeats: Selected Poetry* (London: Pan Books, 1974, 1962), p. 99.
7. "Desk Poet". *Guardian*, 23 March 1965.

8. Zeb Barbu, p. 85.
9. John Lucas, *Modern English Poetry: from Hardy to Hughes* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1986), p. 195.
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11. "Desk Poet", *Guardian*, 23 March 1965.
12. D. H. Lawrence, "Snake" in *The Complete Poems of D. H. Lawrence* in 3 vols. (London: William Heinemann, 1957), II, pp~ 77-80.
13. William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1805), Bk. I, ll. 372--427.
14. John Lucas, p. 195.
15. Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 199.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 199.
17. Public reading at Leeds, 10 March 1979; quoted in Terry Gifford and Neil Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study*, p. 244.
18. John Lucas, p. 194.
19. (Ian Hamilton), review of *Crow* by Ted Hughes, *T.L.S.*, p. 150.
20. See Lucas, pp. 193-94.
21. Keith Sagar, "The Thought-Fox", <<http://www.keithsagar.co.uk/Downloads/Thought-Fox.pdf>>
22. Ted Hughes, *Winter Pollen: Occasional Prose*, (ed.) William Scammell (London: Faber and Faber, 1994, pb. 1995), pp. 8-9.
23. Ted Hughes, *Poetry in the Making* (London: Faber and Faber, 1967,, rpt. 1986), p 15, 17.
24. *Poetry in the Making*, p. 20.
25. *Poetry in the Making*, p. 17.

Chapter Five : The Malignant Violence

1. See Zev Barbu, "Violence in Twentieth Century Literature", *The Modern World*, III ; *Reaction*, pp. 83-116.
2. Hughes, "The Poetry of Keith Douglas", *Listener*, 67 (21 June 1962), p. 1070.
3. Hughes, review of *Men Who March Away: Poems of the First World*, ed. I. M. Parson, *Listener*, 74 (5 Aug. 1965), p. 200.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 200.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 200.
6. Angus Calder, "British Poetry and its Audience, 1914-70", in *The Modern World*, III, eds. David Daiches and Anthony Thorlby, p. 489.
7. See Hughes, review of *Men Who March Away*, *Listener*, 5 Aug 1965, p. 200.
8. Hughes, "The Rock", *Listener* (19 Sept. 1963), p. 483.
9. Hughes, review of *Men Who March Away*, *Listener*, 5 Aug 1965, p. 200.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 200.
11. Hughes, "The Poetry of Keith Douglas", *Listener*, 67 (21 June 1962), p. 1069.
12. C. G. Jung, *Psychological Reflections*, p. 301.
13. Lev Tolstoy, *Stories* (Moscow: Raduga Publishers, 1969, 1983), pp. 195-284.
14. (Ian Hamilton), review of *Crow* by Ted Hughes, *T. L.S.*, p.153.

15. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, 3rd edn., ed. W.Y. Evans-Wentz (London : Oxford University Press, 1957,1960), p. 166.
16. C. G. Jung, *Psychological Reflections*, p. 163.
17. Hughes, review of *The Environmental Revolution* by Max Nicholson, *Spectator*, 224 (21 March 1970), p. 378-79.
18. Hughes, Myth 1, pp. 65-66.
19. C. G. Jung, *Four Archetypes* (1972; rpt. Ark Paperbacks, 1986), p. 19.
20. C. G. Jung, *Psychological Reflection*, p. 100.

Chapter Six : Quarrel with Logos

1. See H. Montgomery Hyde, ed. *The "Lady Chatterley's Lover" Trial* (London: The Bodley Head, 1990), p. 119.
2. Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes* p. 77.
3. Hughes, *The Poet Speaks*, p. 90; see also Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, p. 74.
4. Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, p. 75.
5. This paragraph is a summary of "Logos", *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, Gen. ed. Paul Achtemeter (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985).
6. Donald Taylor, "Theological thoughts about evil" in *The Anthropology of Evil*, ed. David Parkin (Oxford : Basil Blackwell, 1985), pp. 36-37.
7. Ekbert Faas, "Confronting the Horrific" in *On the Poetry of Allen Ginsberg*, ed. Lewis Hyde (Ann Arbor: The Univ. of Michigan Press, 1984), pp. 435-36.
8. Hughes, Note to *A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), p. 199.
9. Appendix, p. 243.
10. Hughes, Note to *A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse*, p. 188.
11. Crow, Claddagh Records CCT 9-10, 1973; quoted in Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, p. 118.
12. Appendix, pp. 243-44.
13. Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 199.
14. Hughes, Note to *A Choice of Shakespeare's Verse*, p. 192.
15. Ibid., p. 199.
16. Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1961, 1975), p. 59.
17. see Ibid., p. 59.
18. Hughes, in Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 205.
19. Russell, p. 58.
20. C. G. Jung, *Psychological Reflections*, pp. 103-4.
21. See Terry Gifford and Neil Roberts, *Ted Hughes: A Critical Study*, p. 255.
22. Chappell, *Popular Music of the Olden Time*, pp. 222-23, quoted in the Notes. Palgrave's *Golden Treasury of Songs and Lyrics*, Bk. I, ed. J. H. Fowler (1903; rpt. London: Macmillan, 1964). pp. 5 & 117.

Chapter Seven : The Way to Healing

1. See Appendix, pp. 154.
2. "Druids", *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Micropaedia. 1974.

3. See Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, pp. 188-189.
4. See Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, p. 215.
5. J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, 3rd ed. (1914; rpt. London: Macmillan, 1955), Part IV, *Adonis, Attis, Osiris*, Vol. I, pp. 263-65, 272.
6. Faas, *The Unaccommodated Universe*, pp. 137-39.
7. See Appendix. p. 154-55.
8. Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, pp. 243-44.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 244.
10. Hughes, Notes to *Selected Poems 1957-81*. p. 237.
11. Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, p. 185.
12. Blake, "The Echoing Green" and "The Shepherd" in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience, and Other Works*, ed. R. B. Kennedy (London: Macdonald and Evans Ltd., 1970), p. 16.
13. C. G. Jung, *The Psychology of the Transference*, ed., tr. R.E.C. Hull (1966; rpt. London: Ark Paperbacks, 1983), p. 165.
14. See Jung, *The Collected Works*, vol. 13 (1967; rpt. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973). pp. 12-13.
15. Quoted in Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (1956; rpt. London : Ark Paperbacks, 1987). p. 54.
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17. Quoted in Iona Opic and Moira Tatem, ed. *A Dictionary of Superstitions* (London; Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), p. 260.
18. Jung, *Transference*, p. 41.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 160, footnote 1.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 95.
24. Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams, Mysteries* (1957; London: Harvill Press, Eng. tr. 1960), pp. 223-24.
25. Quoted from a letter of an English theologian and alchemist, John Pordage in Jung, *Transference*, p. 137.
26. Quoted in Jung, *Transference*, pp. 136-37.
27. See Jung, *Transference*, pp. 41, 80, 112.
28. "A green mother" resembles Duessa in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, Bk. I, Canto 2, st. 26 ff.
29. Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Bk.I, Canto i, st. 7.
30. This can be seen in illustration 10 of *Rosarium Philosophorum* in Jung, *Transference*, p. 145.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 143.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 35-36.
34. See Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, pp. 183-84.

1. Christopher Reid (ed.), *Letters of Ted Hughes* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p. 380.
2. Keith Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), pp.243-44.
3. Ted Hughes, *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), p.1260.
4. *Letters of Ted Hughes*, p. 377.
5. *Letters of Ted Hughes*, p. 377.
6. *Letters of Ted Hughes*, p. 378.
7. Letter to Terry Gifford, *Green Voices: Understanding Contemporary Nature Poetry* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 131-32.
8. Radio Interview with Nigel Forde, quoted in *Green Voices*, p.131.
9. Radio Interview with Nigel Forde in *Green Voices*, p. 131.
10. Letter to Terry Gifford, *Green Voices*, p. 132.
11. Ted Hughes, *Winter Pollen: Occasional Prose*, ed. William Scammell (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), pp. 128-35.
12. Terry Gifford, *Green Voices*, p. 130. There is a draft of a letter (not actually sent) to the Editor of *The Times*, dated 3 December, 1975, and another letter sent to the environmental campaigner and farmer Mark Purdey (7 Feb 1987), on similar issues in *Letters of Ted Hughes*, pp. 370-71 and pp. 533-34 respectively.
13. *Letters of Ted Hughes*, p. 426.
14. Keith Sagar (ed.), *The Achievement of Ted Hughes* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), p. 262.
15. Norwich Tapes, quoted in *Achievement*, p. 267.
16. Brian Baxter, *Ecologism: An Introduction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 38, 41-45.
17. Brian Baxter, *Ecologism: An Introduction*, p. 51.
18. Ted Hughes, *Collected Poems*, p. 1212.
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20. Ted Hughes, *Wolfwatching* (London: Faber, 1989), p. 55; *Collected Poems*, pp.1213-14.
21. http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/endangered_species/rhinoceros/african_rhinos/poaching_crisis_african_rhinos/
22. *Wolfwatching*, p.55.
23. See Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (1948; New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966) p. 410, 255; *Mythology: Myths, legends, & Fantasies*, (New Jersey: Wellfleet Press, 2004) p. 267; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unicorn>
24. Terry Gifford, *Green Voices*, p. 130.
25. Terry Gifford, *Ted Hughes* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 60.
26. Terry Gifford, *Ted Hughes*, p.60; see also Terry Gifford, "Hughes's Social Ecology" in Terry Gifford (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ted Hughes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp.82-84.

Chapter Nine : *Birthday Letters*

1. See "Sylvia Plath: *Ariel*", (1965); "Publishing Sylvia Plath", (1971); "Collecting Sylvia Plath", (1981); "Sylvia Plath and Her Journals", (1982); "Sylvia Plath: The Evolution of 'Sheep in Fog'", (1988) in Ted Hughes, *Winter Pollen*:

- Occasional Prose*, ed. William Scammell (1994; London: Faber and Faber, 1995), pp. 161-211.
2. Christopher Reid (ed.), *Letters of Ted Hughes* (2007; London: Faber and Faber, 2009), p. 703.
 3. *Letters of Ted Hughes*, p. 712.
 4. *Letters of Ted Hughes*, p. 720.
 5. *Letters of Ted Hughes*, pp. 704 & 713 .
 6. Erica Wagner quotes James Fenton, Emily Warn, Robin Morgan and James Wood in *Ariel's Gift: A Commentary on Birthday Letters by Ted Hughes*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), pp. 27-28.
 7. Karen V. Kukil (ed.), *The Journals of Sylvia Plath* (London: Faber and Faber, 2000), pp.211-12. She also wrote to her mother on 3 March 1956 about her meeting "a brilliant ex-Cambridge poet at the wild St. Botolph's Review party last week": see Sylvia Plath, *Letters Home*, ed. Aurelia Plath (1975; New York: HarperPerennial, 1992), pp. 221, 235-36 and 240.
 8. Anne Stevenson, *Bitter Fame: A Life of Sylvia Plath* (Boston: Houghton Miffling Company, 1989), pp. 10-11. See also Karen V. Kukil, p. 431, p. 447.
 9. Chaucer wrote *A Treatise on Astrolabe* in which it is mentioned that an astrolabe can be used to prepare horoscopes. Besides, the many references to astrology and "astronomy" in *The Canterbury Tales* suggests Chaucer's detailed knowledge of astrology; see the description of the physician who chose astrological hours and the powers of the favourable planets for the treatment of his patients. The Wife of Bath in her Prologue says she was born under Taurus and with Mars therein, and refers to Venus who gave her desire and lecherousness and to Mars who gave her hearts boldness; see Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, tr., Nevill Coghill (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, rpt, 1976), pp. 292-93.
 10. Sylvia Plath, *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams* (1978; New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008), p. 27.
 11. Anne Stevenson, pp. 47-48; Karen V. Kukil, pp. 429, 448.
 12. *Letters of Ted Hughes*, p. 722. *Winter Pollen*, p.165.
 13. *Letters Home*, pp. 328-30, 331, 334, 335.
 14. Karen V. Kukil, pp.381, 447.
 15. Karen V. Kukil, p. 431.
 16. Karen V. Kukil, p. 432.
 17. Karen V. Kukil, pp. 429-38
 18. Anne Stevenson, p. 153
 19. Ted Hughes, *Winter Pollen*, p. 187
 20. Karen V. Kukil, p. 447. See also "Barren Woman", CPSP, p.157.
 21. Karen V. Kukil, p.381.
 22. Karen V. Kukil, pp. 429-38.
 23. Sylvia Plath, *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*, pp. 107-17.
 24. *Letters Home*, pp.349-50.
 25. Karen V. Kukil, p. 500. Plath writes: "I would bear children until my change of life if that were possible. I want a house of our children, little animals, flowers, vegetables, fruits. I want to be an Earth Mother in the deepest richest sense."

26. See www.fischerarthistory.com/woman-of-willendorf.html>. LeRoy McDermott in a scholarly research paper entitled "Self-Representation in Upper Paleolithic Female Figurines" challenges the view that the many figurines like the so-called Venus of Willendorf represent concepts like fertility or motherhood and claims that they are accurate self-portraits by mostly pregnant female carvers: *Current Anthropology*, Vol. 37, No 2, April 1996, 227-248, followed by comments by several scholars like Paul G. Bahn, Michael S. Bisson, Jill Cook, Marcia-Ann Dobres and others, 248-275.
27. Nevill Coghill, pp. 276-98.
28. *Winter Pollen*, p. 180.
29. Ann Stevenson, pp. 242-44; Elaine Feinstein, *Ted Hughes: the Life of a Poet* (2001; London: Phoenix, 2002), pp.137-42.
30. *Mythology: Myths, Legends, & Fantasies* (New Jersey: Wellfleet Press, 2004), p. 335; see also http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/9986_lilith> . Ann Skea points out that Lilith who "to the early Jews represented unbridled sexual and emotional energies, becomes most dangerous when repressed or unacknowledged." She also notes that "Cabbalists believe that we must learn to recognise, accept and value this rejected part of our nature and that in this way can her energies be used for creative, rather than destructive, purposes." See *Birthday Letters: Poetry and Magic*, "The Path of the Fool", <http://ann.skea.com/TheFool.htm>
31. *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*, p. 21.
32. *Letters Home*, p. 35.

Appendix : An Interview with Ted Hughes

1. See Faridud-Din Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*, tr. Afkham Darbandi and Davis (London: Penguin Books, 1984). In this translation, the Invocation and the Epilogue have been omitted. A complete translation is: Faridu'd Din Attar, *The Speech of the Birds: Concerning Migration to the Real*. tr. P.W. Avery (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1998).
2. The *vacanas* are devotional free-verse lyrics, composed in Kannada, one of the major South Indian languages.
3. Hughes perhaps refers to *Speaking of Siva*, an anthology of *vacanas* translated with an Introduction by A. K. Ramanujan, (London: Penguin Books, 1973).
4. Perhaps Hughes had in mind *New Lines*, ed. Robert Conquest, (1956; rpt. London: Macmillan, 1962).
5. This book, *Wolfwatching*, became available for study soon after the interview.

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With the emergence of ecocriticism, the works of Ted Hughes, perhaps the greatest post-1950 English poet, are craving fresh attention for their unique imaginative engagement with Nature.

This book, however, attempts to explore of the far wider range and deeper concerns of the major poetry of Ted Hughes. In Part One it examines the literary, cultural and intellectual contexts which frame his poetry, and which also got absorbed, transformed and recreated in his texts. Part Two traces the growth of Hughes's vision by exploring the thematic clusters, formal experiments and verbal energies of his major volumes of poetry from *The Hawk in the Rain* to *Birthday Letters*. The book presents incisive analyses of well-known individual poems like 'The Thought-Fox', 'Thrushes', 'Hawk Roosting', 'Wodow' and so on from the early collections; it also includes detailed commentary on the mythic structure and significance of *Crow*, *Cave Birds* and *Gaudete*. It then analyzes Hughes's sustained focus on the interconnectedness of men and women to their environment as well as their ecological responsibilities to protect the biodiversity of the universe in later volumes like *Season Songs*, *Moortown*, *Remains of Elmet*, *River* and *Wolfwatching*. Finally, the book attempts to investigate the transtextual relations among the poems of *Birthday Letters* and those of Sylvia Plath to whom these poems are addressed. The work is rounded off with Ted Hughes's candid and wide-ranging interview with the author.

Amzed Hossein is currently Associate Professor of English at Aliah University, Kolkata.

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